

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8695/21 Writing
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Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identify factors for writing; plan to write; write; check; correct.
- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they choose. For example, in **Question 2** the key instruction is to 'write two contrasting descriptive pieces', creating a sense of 'atmosphere and place'.
- Effective planning, following on from successful interpretation of the question, leads to better crafted and well-shaped responses, therefore minimising irrelevant detail and generic content.
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed *form* and *audience* as well as the most appropriate *voice* or persona to adopt, the *mood* and *tone* that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable *structure* to employ.
- A key aspect of the most successful and effective writing in **Section A** is a convincing and credible narrator/persona, while the key aspects of the most successful and effective writing in **Section B** are a clearly developed, logically sequenced structure, together with an authentic sense of voice.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation. Clear expression in simple and compound sentences without much variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops. Sentence demarcation is key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- There was often a need for improved syntactical awareness, with many weaker responses featuring long unpunctuated sentences. Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must also be aware of the need for correct spelling and paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech.
- In preparing for **Section A**: Imaginative writing, candidates should develop skills in differentiating between 'showing' versus 'telling', to improve both descriptive and narrative skills.
- When preparing for **Section B**: Writing for an audience, candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation. Candidates should be exposed to the tone, register and format of magazine articles, newspaper correspondence, speeches and voiceover scripts.

General comments

Technical accuracy tended to be more secure in **Section B** than in **Section A**, where tense errors and confusions often impeded communication. **Section B** responses were also often structured more effectively than **Section A** responses. It may, therefore, be appropriate for centres to advise candidates to attempt their chosen **Section B** task before their **Section A** task.

Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to visualise the sound, light and colour in **Question 3**. Some imaginative writing fell down due to issues relating to structural control (for example, an entire piece written as one paragraph) or to the use of suitable language devices to create effects. Tense confusions persisted, especially in attempts to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**. Candidates should be encouraged to utilise one main tense in their stories, and those who have difficulty in this area might be well advised to write in the present tense where possible, as this seemed to lead to fewer errors. Weaker candidates should be encouraged to practise writing in either 1st or 3rd person for narratives so that they are less likely to drift from one to the other.

The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Areas for improvement in weaker responses were in using the conventions of different forms, establishing a mature, credible voice, and developing a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story called *Found!* about an important discovery. In your writing, create a sense of drama and excitement.

While most candidates wrote complete stories, some responses were only story openings. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of structuring responses so that purpose is clear. Some candidates produced responses which did not wholly fulfil the purpose of creating a sense of drama and excitement. For example, one candidate chose to write a story where the main character was searching around his house for his car keys as he had to get to an important meeting. Despite the piece being well written, the story lacked suspense and drama.

Stronger candidates focused clearly on establishing a clear setting, some creating fantasy pieces, with strange lands and explorers in search of lost cities or long-lost treasure. The opening paragraph of these successful responses engaged and intrigued the reader as the story unfolded. For example, one candidate created drama and intrigue with a simple opening paragraph: 'Boom! A blinding light flashed. Pain seared through my body, my limbs went numb, my mind swirled, then there was darkness.' Other successful approaches included characters searching for something hidden for a very long time and often nearly inaccessible, such as a ruin from an ancient civilisation in a remote part of the world or a sunken ship. Stronger candidates focused on the reaction of their characters to events, rather than merely describing events. For example: 'Even though he wore a scuba mask I could see the glint of excitement in his eyes'.

Weaker responses often had over-complicated storylines which were in need of control and a clearer link to the title, often with too many characters. The search for something lost became embroiled in detail, leaving the reader in want of a sense of an ending or resolution. Such stories tended to go from one minor climax to another, preventing the narrative from building a real sense of excitement. Where some had attempted to use advanced vocabulary, this caused the writing to become confused and unclear. Others showed a need for improvements in syntactical awareness, with long stretches of poorly punctuated dialogue: 'Jonny look what I found what is it? I want to see. Look it was all the way at the bottom of the lake, I was down there for about three minutes before I seen it.'

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300 – 450 words each): the first about a lake which is frozen over in midwinter; and the second about the same lake, in the middle of summer. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

Most candidates focused on description, with only a few narrative responses.

Stronger candidates maintained a clear focus on description throughout their responses, sometimes beginning very vividly, as in this example: 'Underneath a black, moonless sky an icy lake sits dormant; its lifeless shores barren, smothered by a thick covering of snow'. Many stronger candidates constructed their two pieces with a close parallel in the range of details of the lake in the different seasons, often replicating

the sequence of descriptions used in relation to the frozen-over lake and then in the middle of summer. Atmosphere was often developed through the portrayal of differing moods of the describing persona, for example a depressed mood for the frozen lake and a happy mood for the summer lake. Some candidates, however, projected a persona appreciative of the solitude of the winter lake and despairing of the relentless intrusion of humans engaging in water sports and 'cook outs' during the summer.

Stronger candidates retained focus on description throughout their responses, selecting vocabulary precisely and structuring sentences carefully, as in this example: 'Icicles droop from thin fir trees lining the lake, jutting out from rocky cliffs and trembling with each passing gust of icy wind off the distant mountaintops. All is silent in the air but for the sharp whistling of the wind that tears through pine needles and threatens to rip the bark from the trees, which hang precariously over the frozen surface of the lake'.

In weaker responses, focus often drifted from the lake itself and its atmosphere. Some became a narrative, for example describing a family trip to a lake, meeting up with friends, or jet-skiing across the lake and having a picnic. Others described what they could see in a list type structure, needing development and to establish a sense of atmosphere and mood.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *The Castle*. In your writing, focus on sound, light and colour to help your reader imagine the scene.

Quite often, description was structured within a narrative framework and sometimes this was effective, as long as the focus of the writing remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates often used the perspective of moving through the castle from outside to inside. There were some narrative frames which were successful, for example using the voice of a caretaker or describing the progression from an abandoned to a revitalised castle. Stronger candidates portrayed the castle as a 'monster' or 'beast', or subtly used personification, describing its 'pulse' and its 'vulnerability'. One candidate wrote about a castle in a wood: 'I was shocked, in awe; my mouth gaped open as I laid my eyes on the majestic castle with long, green rope-like vines hanging from decaying walls'. A different approach described a sandcastle, with some effective description. Some candidates described sounds effectively, describing their psychological engagement with, and reaction to, features encountered within an abandoned castle.

While the better responses focused throughout on the castle, some weaker ones became absorbed in narrative, starting from leaving home and eventually arriving at the castle. Many went through the prompts in a pedestrian manner, first writing about sound, then light and finally colours. They often listed adjectives extensively to produce dry catalogues of colours and sounds. There was evidence that a number of candidates felt that fragmented sentences enhanced the descriptive quality of their writing, when in fact the lack of appropriate sentence demarcation detracted from the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. The continuous present tense was at times overused, resulting in non-standard sentence construction, which was often unclear.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Article for school magazine

In class, you have been discussing whether 16-year-olds are too young to drive cars. Write an article for your school magazine, giving your opinion on the topic.

Many responses showed clear engagement with the topic and many used sub-headings and topic sentences effectively to assist in structuring the article. Most candidates managed to write with an appropriate sense of audience and candidates across all bands attempted to use engaging devices and techniques – direct address, rhetorical questions and anecdotes, for example. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority argued that a 16-year-old should be allowed to drive.

Stronger candidates used rhetorical language effectively to persuade their audience, linking the topic directly to their lives. One candidate, like several others, began by using a rhetorical question and also personalised the issue thus: 'Fellow young drivers, have you ever been at the wheel and thought to yourself, "I'm worried about my driving"?' Another candidate chose a different technique to begin their article, again engaging the audience: 'Maturity does not always come with age. It comes with experience'. Stronger candidates gave a developed range of points and wrote passionately, engaging with a wide range of issues such as responsibility, independence, convenience and learning to drive as an important life skill. One candidate

engaged the audience throughout, beginning the conclusion to their article like this: 'So, should 16 year olds drive? Are we responsible enough? Do we have enough experience? Are we dangers on the road? In order, my answers to those questions are, "Yes", "Yes" and "Yes". Did that last one catch you off-guard? Well, it should not. Anyone can be a danger on the road and we happen to be as dangerous as everyone else.'

Weaker responses sometimes developed one or two ideas, but often became repetitive or provided lots of facts and information. They also made unsubstantiated, vague claims and often forgot the form and audience, not addressing the school audience at all. In others, focus drifted from the question, becoming absorbed in lengthy personal anecdotes.

Question 5 – Contrasting letters

A newspaper recently published an article about the amount of money that governments spend on wildlife conservation. Readers were invited to respond to this article. Write two contrasting letters (300 – 450 words each): one supporting the use of government money for wildlife conservation, and the other opposing it.

The requirement to write two contrasting letters was achieved by candidates across the ability range. The question produced some interesting arguments for and against using government money in this way, with some mature and well thought-out answers, with developed arguments and thoughtful conclusions.

Stronger candidates produced some highly convincing, contrasting pieces of writing that were fully credible. Form was carefully observed and a lively and passionate style was employed with some quite subtle ideas and arguments such as: the extinction of other species potentially being a precursor to the extinction of the human race; the interconnectedness of different species (including humans) and native flora and fauna that enrich the general environment for humanity's benefit; the escalating costs that will need to be met in future, resulting from the disappearance of natural habitats and hence the biodiversity humans depend upon; the decline of poaching and other such unethical incursions on endangered species. Stronger candidates successfully wrote their two letters with a strong sense of contrasting voices, as in the following example. The letter supporting the use of government money for wildlife conservation began: 'Conserving wildlife is, and should always remain, a main focus of our government; we must do all we can to preserve and, if necessary, restore ecosystems to their original state', while the letter opposing the idea began: 'Why are we so fixated on helping animals instead of each other?'

Weaker candidates tended to produce short answers which needed development, often merely listing the pros and cons of wildlife preservation. Some struggled with contrast and the negative response turned into a rant, often leading to short work. Differentiation between the two voices at times needed to be clearer. Some candidate struggled with the letter form, with the writing becoming more of an article.

Question 6 – Speech

A new community centre is going to open in your area. There will be an official opening ceremony, and a guest speaker has been invited to give a speech. Write the text for the speech. In your writing, focus on the benefits of having a space for the community to get together, and create a sense of opportunity and motivation.

The conventions of a speech were deployed on most occasions, usually quite successfully.

Stronger candidates struck a positive tone and evoked a sense of community, as in this example: 'All of us here come from different parts of the town, different homes, different backgrounds, different lives. But, at the end of the day, we are all gathered here as one, as a community'. They cited a range of positive ideas about the community centre, such as the community cohesion it would encourage, the opportunity for recreation for young people and how it could be used as a venue for a variety of communal events. Many also focused on how it would encourage children to 'get active, make real connections and put down their phones and video games'. Stronger candidates produced a clear structure for their speeches, and had a good sense of audience, often grounding their speeches in personal experience.

In weaker responses, points often needed further development, with many listing a huge and unrealistic range of facilities in the new community centre, such as huge, Olympic size swimming pools and gyms equipped with a long list of top-of-the-range exercise machines. Some speeches were in need of an appropriate introduction or conclusion.

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General comments

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Quite a number of submissions self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some were appreciably short of the minimum word limit. Candidates should practise writing time-limited tasks to a specific word length.

For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere. For example, the reader was able to feel a sense of suspense and drama in the story in **Question 1**. Some imaginative writing fell down due to issues relating to structural control (for

example, an entire piece written as one paragraph) or to the use of suitable language devices to create effects. Tense confusions persisted, especially in attempts to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**. Candidates should be encouraged to utilise one main tense in their stories, and those who have difficulty in this area might be well advised to write in the present tense where possible, as this seemed to lead to fewer errors. Weaker candidates should be encouraged to practise writing in either 1st or 3rd person for narratives so that they are less likely to drift from one to the other.

The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Areas for improvement in weaker responses were in using the conventions of different forms, establishing a mature, credible voice, and developing a well thought out, logically organised line of argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *The doorbell rang and I realised I had run out of time.* In your writing, create a sense of suspense and drama.

While most candidates wrote complete stories, some responses were only story openings. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of structuring responses so that purpose is clear. Some candidates produced responses which did not wholly fulfil the purpose of creating a sense of suspense and drama. For example, a candidate chose to write a story where the main character, a wedding guest, was late for a wedding. Despite the piece being well written, the story lacked suspense and drama.

Stronger candidates were successful in creating suspense and drama and incorporated the opening sentence successfully, through the use of intense moments developed through descriptive details. Many successfully moved on from the opening sentence into a flashback to relate the narrative which led to the given opening. Several opted for the thriller genre, with a gangster/killer/chase type scenario, which satisfied the task. Frequently, the central idea in these narratives was the main character being locked inside a building, hiding from a known individual. Some stories featured espionage or an escaped fugitive being the central character; others focused on a central character trying to escape an abusive partner or relationship.

Stronger candidates addressed purpose through a range of linguistic techniques. Suspense was often gradual, keeping the reader alert, as in the following example: 'I stood in front of the main door with no choice but to open it and face the police. I held the doorknob, my hands sweaty and arms aching ...'.

Weaker candidates sometimes chose to focus their story around a domestic scenario (such as cooking for a dinner party before the guests arrived). These stories tended to lack suspense and drama, as seen in one response that centred around a character packing a suitcase to go on holiday – more attention needed to be given to using language to create a sense of urgency for either the waiting taxi driver or the would-be holiday maker. The piece ended with the would-be holiday maker missing their flight due to packing, and the whole of the response was dominated by the packing of a suitcase. Others had over-complicated storylines which were in need of control and a clearer link to the line quoted in the question, often with too many characters. The reader was often left in want of a sense of an ending or resolution, as the narrative moved from one minor climax to another without ever really building suspense.

Question 2 – Contrasting descriptive pieces

Write two contrasting descriptive pieces (300 – 450 words each) about a market square: the first while the market is in progress; and the second on the same day after the market has closed. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere and place.

Most candidates focused on description and successfully described contrasting scenes, with only a few narrative responses.

Stronger candidates focused on the atmosphere in the market, with clearly contrasted details, for example: 'Laughter entangles itself with the sounds of a violin being heard next to a game of chess being battled out between two nearby elders' and, in the 2nd piece, 'The blooms of the morning wither and their scent dulls in comparison to the stench of poverty.' Stronger candidates zoomed in on minutiae, mirrored

cohesive details, and sometimes used narrative frameworks effectively. Many used simple but effective choices of vocabulary with some vivid imagery, such as, 'The bare wooden walls stripped clean of their beautiful merchandise and draped ceilings, lay naked under the dimming rain.'

Some responses achieved a smooth, cohesive transition from describing the market when busy to when it was closed, by connecting the two parts. For example, one observer, having strolled through the busy market, entered a café after shopping and left as the market had closed: 'Silence. An almost palpable serene silence paraded the streets as I exited the café.' The device of pathetic fallacy was sometimes used effectively to achieve a sense of atmosphere and place; in one case, describing gathering rain clouds after the market had closed, in contrast to the bright sunny morning at opening time.

Weaker responses often needed more attention to creating a sense of place, sometimes centring almost entirely on lists of stalls and what they were selling, to the extent that the response became repetitive. Some candidates over-used adjectives or attempted to write in complex sentences when they would have written more clearly in simple or compound sentences. For example one candidate wrote: 'The once there breathtaking coffe brewes is gone instead its the sugar coma inviting smell nothing but rich extremly sweet melted sugar is battling the smell of the paint fumes and the frightnin scary invite from the colestrol oils.'

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *The Laboratory*. In your writing, focus on colour, sound and smell to help your reader imagine the scene.

Quite often description was structured within a narrative framework and sometimes this was effective, as long as the focus of the writing remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates retained a sharp focus on colour, sound and smell throughout the response. Where narrative was incorporated, it was kept to a minimum or used judiciously, sometimes with a first- or third-person voice being used in an observatory capacity, describing the laboratory from a particular perspective. Stronger candidates captured mood and atmosphere well, for example: 'Dark greens, deep blues and vibrant purples mix and mash, explode! Particles dance in the air, visible to the naked eye thanks to the sun's curious gaze. The students are a whirlwind of white coats, occasional laughter and respectable silence.' Some candidates successfully employed the present tense to achieve a strong sense of immediacy, with better ones also being able to integrate descriptions of colour, sound and smell as seen in this example: 'The taps on the burettes are opened, letting the antiseptic-smelling purple solution trickle through with its refreshing sound. The humming air conditioners join in on the melody, shutting out the tick-tocking clock.'

Some weaker responses merely identified everything in a laboratory and some simply listed objects, for example: 'The smell of disinfectant hits the nostrils instantly. Long bright lights raced across the ceiling. It was very well lit.' Others became absorbed in narrative, starting from arriving at a school and eventually locating the laboratory. Adjectives were often listed extensively to produce dry catalogues of colours and sounds. There was evidence that a number of weaker candidates seemed to feel that fragmented sentences enhanced the descriptive quality of their writing, when in fact the lack of appropriate sentence demarcation detracted from the effects which the vocabulary selection was intended to create. The continuous present tense was often overused, resulting in non-standard sentence construction, which was often unclear.

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Report for school magazine

You recently attended an event called *Your Future*, where you got information and advice about future study and employment. Write a report for your school magazine, describing the event and evaluating how useful you found it.

Stronger candidates structured their responses clearly and some used a headline and sub-headings appropriate for a magazine report. Many candidates took on the title of the event, *Your Future*, and used the second person pronoun throughout, to engage the reader and successfully connect to their target audience. They sequenced ideas logically and often made use of sub-headings (e.g. 'Your journey starts today') to set up their argument. To avoid what could be monotonous recount of a young person's experience, some candidates kept the text informal, as in this example: 'With a list in hand I entered the building to find literally thousands of stalls and desks arranged in symmetrical patterns across the building, covering all floors.'

Weaker responses tended to consist of descriptions of all the different stalls available at the event, and of interviews with world-renowned scientists, employers or businesspeople. Typically, they provided lots of facts and information but often neglected the form and audience, not addressing the school audience at all. Others neglected the second part of the question, with no evaluation of the event and its usefulness.

Question 5 – Contrasting letters

A newspaper recently published an article saying that people will be able to live on the planet Mars in the near future. Readers were invited to write letters to respond to this article. Write two contrasting letters (300 – 450 words each): one positive about the idea of living on Mars, and the other negative about it.

While candidates who selected this question showed no shortage of material and ideas, not all of them observed the letter format or acknowledged the article.

Stronger candidates provided some passionate and honest ideas, some seeing the possibility of living on Mars as an escape, with some rather depressing comments on the state of planet Earth and the pandemic. As a counter-argument, candidates saw an opportunity to fix our problems. Some enjoyable responses used knowledge of climate change, population growth and other issues on Earth to back up their arguments about moving to Mars. Where candidates had thought carefully about the article to which they were responding, they wrote with a sense of conviction. For instance, one response referred to the article's imagined headline: 'Another Giant Leap for Mankind.'

One outstanding response to this question was from a candidate who used the contrasting voices and perspectives of a mother and her son. The mother felt strongly that her naive son and his impressionable young peers were being corrupted by articles such as she was responding to, and wrote a very strongly argued letter, with a wide range of fluently expressed and logically developed points. The son, meanwhile, an aspiring astronaut, wrote an equally impassioned positive letter in response to the article, which featured a very strong voice and an effective structure. Other responses were cogently argued and made use of a varied vocabulary, for example: 'It is certainly no secret that man is a greedy animal; neither is it remotely possible to objectively deny that this greed has led to extreme and irreversible exploitation of the scarce resources available to us on Earth.' There were some effective conclusions, achieving a strong sense of voice: 'Space exploration is for the betterment of mankind and is money well spent in my opinion. We can finally be like Captain Jean-Luc Picard and travel around space. The final frontier.'

Weaker responses were often vague, and were insecure in terms of form and audience. They tended to answer the task in the form of a list of possible benefits and drawbacks to living on Mars, with a need for development of ideas.

Question 6 – Voiceover script

Write the voiceover script for a television news report about an awards ceremony for children who have done something very brave. In your writing, focus on the mood and atmosphere of the occasion.

The format of a voiceover was something of a challenge for weaker candidates, with responses often not being fully appropriate to the task.

Stronger candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the style and purpose of the task, as in the following example, which set the scene for the bravery that the children at the awards ceremony were being rewarded for, as well as establishing a strong sense of voice: 'The town, aptly named Rocky River after the rocky river that flows through it, is used to these types of cases, although the victims typically meet a more gruesome end. The speed of the river can go up to 50 mph during this season and the town attributes an average of six deaths per year to the river.' Stronger responses clearly focused on the 'mood and atmosphere of the occasion' rather than merely recounting the bravery of the children: 'It's not every day you meet a child who can stun an auditorium into silence.'

Weaker responses revealed a struggle to meet the demands of the required form, and a need for some candidates to develop their understanding of the format and purpose of a voiceover script. Some candidates wrote articles about the awards ceremony, rather than a voiceover script. Some attempted to include a dialogue between the child heroes and the presenter of the news report, simultaneously giving a description of what video or image was being shown on the screen. This was unnecessary and resulted in a lack of clear focus on the mood and atmosphere of the occasion.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Imaginative writing

Question 1 – Story

Write the opening to a story called *What could possibly go wrong?* about an event that had been carefully planned. In your writing, create a sense of drama and anticipation.

Stronger candidates managed to create a sense of both drama and anticipation without an over-reliance on melodrama. Several candidates developed interesting characters and a strong narrative voice, handling dialogue and/or internal thought with skill and originality. There were some interesting plots that were achieved through good structure and a strong voice. Themes varied, ranging from parties to fugitives in grave danger.

Stronger responses exhibited tight narrative control. One candidate created drama and anticipation in his description of a bombing raid: 'The third step, contingent on whether we made it this far or not, was the actual drop of the A112 bomb (aka the 'Motherload'). Satellite recon revealed an out of place housing unit suspected of holding the oil.' Stronger candidates set the scene well and sometimes related it to characters' emotion or thoughts, for example: 'Dark thoughts filled my mind as the looming essence of nighttime came over me. The worst thing about the nighttime is the deathly coldness that surrounds every part of you.'

Weaker responses often started off with characters getting out of bed and having breakfast, an ineffective way of creating drama. There were many stories centred around surprise parties, minor mishaps or family arguments, while others were set over a lengthy time period, with multiple characters, settings and plot points, more in line with the conventions of a novel. They often used simplistic phrasing such as 'Then I' or 'The next day' as a means to move the story on. Some plots were either uneventful and lacking drama, or overly melodramatic. There was at times a struggle to use imagery effectively and create interesting characters, e.g.: 'John parked a cute, big smile onto his face. He had carefully planned everything. It was all going to be as perfect as perfectly can be. He was really excited because he knew his plans were perfect.'

Question 2 – Contrasting blogs

Write two contrasting blogs (300 – 450 words each) about the launch of a space shuttle: the first by an astronaut who was on board the space shuttle; and the second by a person who watched it take off. In your writing, create a sense of mood and atmosphere.

Most candidates managed to create fairly convincing contrasting personas and voices, some with a strong understanding of form.

Stronger candidates vividly conveyed the mood and atmosphere both within the shuttle and around the launch pad. One candidate wrote with purpose: 'The engines roar as if twelve hundred lions catch their first meals in a fortnight. The rocket shoots up into the sky with a blazing glory leaving everyone on earth celebrating with tears of joy and claps of relief. But it was not over yet. The rocket galloped to the heavens beyond.' Other stronger candidates successfully utilised imagery: 'There was a distant roar of sound, like a grumbling bear disturbed from its slumber.' The spectators' perspective was described equally effectively, as in this example: 'We seemed to all become expectant parents, arms open to receive our sprinting child, as the sound of the engines travelled towards us.' One interesting approach involved having the wife of the astronaut from the first piece as the observer who described watching the launch in the contrasting piece. This allowed for deeper exploration of the characters' moods. Other contrasting perspectives were fascinating, such as an astronaut who should have been on the shuttle but was now in hospital and a son

who took his mother to witness the event as a birthday surprise. She had been present at the 1969 shuttle launch in Florida.

Weaker candidates' responses often had less focus on the launch itself, with some allowing their answer to become a narrative, for example describing a family trip to the launchpad. Others described what they could see inside and outside the space shuttle in a list type structure, needing development and to create a sense of mood and atmosphere.

Question 3 – Descriptive writing

Write a descriptive piece called *The Carnival*. In your writing, focus on colour, sound and movement to help your reader imagine the scene.

Quite often, description was structured within a narrative framework and sometimes this was effective, as long as the focus of the writing remained descriptive.

Stronger candidates wrote imaginative and powerful descriptive pieces. They kept to the descriptive stance throughout the piece, and colour, sound and movement were described with subtlety and precision. A strong sense of how to engage the audience was apparent in some responses, such as: 'Oversized mismatched tents were scattered around the stadium sized field. Colours ranged from the familiar red of Ronald McDonald's nose, to the bright pink of Barbie's ball gown to the yellow of a Starburst wrapper.' The excitement and atmosphere was evoked effectively by some candidates: 'As we occasionally spun past the evenly spaced mirrors on the ride, I caught glimpses of myself sitting on a gleaming golden saddle atop a white stallion; mouth slightly open and clinging on, as if for dear life.'

Weaker responses often consisted of phrases that hadn't been incorporated into full sentences. This detracted from the overall effect, as did an excessive use of over-ambitious vocabulary, often used out of context. Sometimes imaginative writing was marred by awkward sentence construction and confusion of tenses: 'The smell of genourosly buttered popcorn and frying oil calling, yearning for attention made their stomachs growl. Younger social outcasts leaving their temporary safe haven to scout for food from their distracted family members to return with.'

Some weaker responses drifted from focus on the carnival to what sometimes seemed like pre-planned answers describing adverse weather or a storm. There was often over-writing of description, which lessened the overall effect of the writing. For example, 'It was as if a harmonious explosion of the brightest, vibrant colours went off in the field. The lush, verdant and rich meadow was transformed into an array of beauty, translucent drapes protected the entryway as excited children sprinted through, separating them cautiously.'

Section B: Writing for an audience

Question 4 – Article for school magazine

In class, you have been discussing whether society should encourage young people to be competitive. Write an article for your school magazine, giving your opinion on the topic.

Stronger candidates used rhetorical language effectively to engage the audience, linking the topic directly to their lives. Some addressed both purpose and audience in a convincing opening, sometimes incorporating a rhetorical question: 'At this school we strive to be the best version of ourselves we can possibly be. I mean, that's our motto, is not it?' Many used specific, often personal, examples of competitive situations and how they were either useful or counterproductive. They did this by creating a strong voice and giving a clear opinion: 'Competition sparks innovation and can be a way of interacting socially. Competition in business leads to consumer friendly prices and products, and competition through sports can bring people together.'

Stronger candidates planned and paragraphed their work and were able to present coherent, interesting arguments using a variety of supporting evidence. They also used headings, sub-headings and topic sentences effectively to assist them in structuring their article and quoted experts or statistics to further back up their points. They took a variety of approaches, including personal experience of over-ambitious parents and the potential consequences of living in an overly competitive world: 'No amount of competition is worth the value of a human soul, ever!'. Some made comparisons with the natural world: 'You never hear of lazy lions or wandering water buffalos. The natural world is competitive because life in the wild is competitive.'

Weaker candidates provided lots of facts and information, but made some claims that were unsubstantiated and vague. Form and audience were often neglected, with many not addressing the school audience at all.

Others lost focus, with lengthy anecdotes and failing to give a clear opinion on the topic. Others interpreted 'competitive' in a very narrow way, relating the term mainly to business and market forces. There was a consensus that competition should be encouraged but that excessive competition was detrimental to our mental health. Weaker candidates repeated this point throughout their responses. Points were sometimes made reasonably clearly but became repetitive and needed development. One such candidate had one main point running throughout the article. The article opened: 'Too much competition is bad for us and people can develop mental health problems when the competition gets to them.' The third paragraph repeated the same point: 'As I have already said many mental health problems come from the competition getting a lot of importance in the lives of a person', and concluded: 'We must not let competition become the most important thing for it can lead to many problems for the people who are getting their mental health affected.'

Question 5 – Contrasting letters

A local newspaper recently published an article challenging people to avoid using any digital devices for a week. Readers were invited to take up the challenge and to write letters about their experience. Write two contrasting letters (300 – 450 words each): one by a person whose experience was positive and the other by a person whose experience was negative.

Responses to this question generally showed clear engagement with the topic. Many candidates had strong opinions on the subject and plenty of experience to draw upon.

Stronger candidates focused on creating two contrasting personas and viewpoints. For example, one candidate opened their two letters thus: 'Dear Editor, my name is Jenny Black. I am a mother of three wonderful children and a stay-at-home mum. I first came across your article when my friend at book club recommended it'; 'Dear Editor, I came across your article through my wife who is worried about exposure to technology.' Stronger candidates were able to write persuasively and convincingly with a good range of points and examples. There were some interesting and knowledgeable points made about the nature of scrolling, 'liking' on social media and clickbait, linked to dopamine and serotonin release and addiction.

Many stronger candidates created totally credible personas. One response had a letter from a personal trainer set against a publishing agent. Another saw a fairly relaxed grandfather using his device to read the newspaper and research gardening problems, opposite a business person with all the expected pressures of a tech-free work life.

Weaker responses struggled to fulfil the form of a letter and ideas needed development. Several candidates had one of the correspondents claim that not being able to use electronic devices made it impossible to do their job in IT, for example, which missed the point of the question. Other less successful responses included lengthy narratives of everything that went wrong as a result of not having a mobile phone.

Question 6 – Voiceover script

Write the voiceover script for part of a television documentary about the world's greatest inventions. The documentary is aimed at a teenage audience, and aims to show how these inventions have shaped the world we live in. In your writing, create a sense of interest and enthusiasm.

There was evidence that weaker candidates struggled with the format of a voiceover, which often led to responses not being fully appropriate to the task.

Stronger candidates had a good grasp of what a voiceover should sound like. They focused closely on certain inventions and avoided the potential trap of being too general in their approach. They presented a detailed visual illustration of the footage, which was then well supported by the verbal component of the voiceover text. For example, one candidate, writing about the invention of the compass, had a clear sense of how a voiceover helps anchor a visual image: '(Fades into a video of sailors lost at sea). "Picture this: you are helpless, lost and stuck in deep sea. A storm is slowly descending on your ship. Your crew members are beginning to lose faith in your guidance. It is a mayhem of fear and chaos. Do not even think about using a telephone – this is the 1650s."' Other stronger responses focused on a range of relevant inventions and wrote in a register that conveyed enthusiasm and interest.

Weaker responses eschewed the required form, showing little discernible understanding of the format and purpose of a voiceover script. Appropriate form and content were not always clear; for example, some writing was closer to an article than to a voiceover script. Some examples that were included were inaccurate, such as claiming that agriculture or electricity were inventions.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/91
Poetry, Prose and Drama

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/92
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on how the meaning and content of texts is shaped by the writer.
- Successful responses use specific references and quotations to support points. This is particularly important for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own material to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.
- Responses which summarise the content of text or passage only are not successful.

General comments

In this series, there were some responses to every question on the poetry and prose texts, with the two Cambridge anthologies, *Songs of Ourselves* and *Stories of Ourselves*, *Small Island* and the poetry of Robert Frost being particularly popular choices. Owen Sheers' poetry, a new text, had an initially small take-up, but elicited some enthusiastic and thoughtful responses. Most candidates showed knowledge of the content and subject matter of their chosen texts, and most made at least some attempt to explore ways in which the writers communicate their concerns through choices of language, form and structure. The most successful were able to accomplish this with confidence, analysing detail to support their arguments. There were some examples of sophisticated and subtle writing.

Questions on specific questions

Question 1 Robert Frost: Selected Poems

- (a)** Many candidates interpreted the differences between humankind and the natural world in terms of how human beings work with or against nature, thus demonstrating the different traits of each. This gave a wealth of poems from which to choose and popular options were *An Encounter*, *Mending Wall*, *Birches*, *Gathering Leaves*, *Mowing*, *After Apple Picking*, *There Are Roughly Zones* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Some fruitful lines of argument which emerged were, for example, people's insistence on fixed boundaries while nature is limitless and resistant (*Mending Wall*); human beings' constant pushing of boundaries whereas the natural world keeps within its limitations (*There Are Roughly Zones*); humanity's need to dominate when nature in fact dominates humanity (*An Encounter*); humanity's impatience with nature's constant patient cycle of seasons (*Gathering Leaves*). The particular argument depended on the choice of poems and the higher marks were awarded to essays which showed a clear understanding of Frost's poetic methods as well as the content of the poems.

- (b) There was a large number of enthusiastic responses to the passage from 'The Ax-Helve'. Many candidates clearly knew the poem well, while others did not know what part of an axe a 'helve' is and were unable to deduce it from the context. The most successful answers clearly focused on the terms of the question, looking at the presentation of Baptiste and his skills. His accent and ungrammatical English were noted in the short elements of dialogue, while it also shows his ability to assess a piece of wood with expertise. His hard manual work was seen in his 'rough hand' and the comment that he could 'make a short job long/ For love of it'. His skills are apparent in the sensual descriptions of the ax-helves he has made – 'slender as a whipstock', 'its curves were no false curves', 'long white body'. His generosity was generally noted, in wishing the narrator 'To have the best he had', but alert candidates noted the importance of the speaker's perspective throughout, who is grudging and suspicious, apparent in 'Needlessly soon' and 'unscrupulously'. Some suggested this was also the reason behind the use of the Eden image at the end of the extract. Others suggested that the narrator has an unconscious admiration of Baptiste, apparent in the chivalric imagery of the 'quiverful' of helves and the chosen one 'bending like a sword across his knee'. Many candidates were well-informed too about the historical context and the reluctance of immigrant French Canadians to trust the American education system, which here presents Baptiste as an outsider in the community. There were some comments on form, noting that, as in Frost's other long narrative poems, the iambic pentameter allows for easy colloquial story-telling into which dialogue fits comfortably.

Question 2 Owen Sheers: *Skirrid Hill*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

- (a) Candidates who chose it focused mainly on *When You Are Old* and *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year*, with a few on Shakespeare's *Sonnet 19*. The essays showed quite thorough knowledge of the content and meaning of the poems, though exploration of the poets' choices of language and structure was often less evident. Candidates knew that Shakespeare's poem is a sonnet, for example, but careful analysis of how he exploits that structure was rare.
- (b) There were a number of essays by candidates who had not grasped the personification of Love established in the first stanza and therefore analysed the poem as a depiction of the love between a mother and a literal child, which led to fundamental misunderstanding. While most candidates grasped the personification, many presented a paraphrase of the meaning of the poem, working through it line by line. More sophisticated answers noted the irony of the poem's title, initially suggesting celebration, while others commented that the tight form of tetrameter couplets is reflective of the speaker's control of her emotional disappointment. There was some subtle discussion of the repeated pronoun 'He', with candidates suggesting that though this can be identified as Cupid by putting 'Love', 'child' and 'flying' together, the repeated use of the male pronoun implies that the failings of Love are the failings of men. There were some supporting historical and biographical contextual comments. In looking at the imagery of the poem, candidates found most to say about the 'Feathers' and 'Wolves' metaphors in the final stanza.

Question 4 E M Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) Henry Wilcox provoked some critical personal responses which demonstrated secure knowledge of the novel and the character. Many candidates showed awareness of his role in the text as well as Forster's presentation of him, and several used useful contextual knowledge of the Edwardian time period to show how Forster uses Wilcox to explore shifting attitudes. While some candidates wrote generally about the character, more confident candidates used Helen's cue as a prompt to engage clearly with the reader's response to him and the way Forster prompts and develops the reader's sympathies over the course of the novel.
- (b) This was a passage which repaid careful reading and close, detailed comment. Successful candidates explored the tone of the narrative voice, with some identifying a kind of sympathetic knowingness, while others disapproved of the contemptuous dismissal of the 'amorous little hole'

and Leonard's cultural aspirations. Confident candidates were able to analyse how the narrator creates a detached view of Leonard, imposing a judgement of him on the reader with a phrase like 'Take my word for it' as well as comments on Ruskin's voice, like 'How supreme its command of admonition!' and the ironic praise of Leonard's understanding of the 'spirit of English prose' at the end of the extract. Some candidates were able to explore productively how Leonard's home and possessions reflected his character, his social position and his poverty. Several commented on the fragility of his existence conveyed through the rented and 'makeshift' nature of his accommodation and his lack of possessions, while some also were able to distinguish between the items belonging to Jacky, the landlord and Leonard. Candidates frequently discussed the breaking of the glass over the picture and either saw Leonard's swearing as ineffectual or a sign of his 'lower class' status, which in some cases led to rather sweeping assertions about the differences in behaviour of upper and lower class people. While there were plenty of comments on the 'dusty crumbs' of cake, surprisingly few essays focused on Leonard's attempts to imitate the prose style of Ruskin and the comic inappropriateness of this elegant prose style with the realities of his position and dwelling.

Question 5 **Andrea Levy: *Small Island***

- (a) In response to this question, candidates naturally focused on Gilbert's difficulties at work and in finding work suitable for him and on Hortense's disappointment in trying to find work as a teacher in England. This led to a broader discussion of the difficulties faced by Caribbean immigrants in England. The strongest essays were well supported with appropriate detail, often contrasting the characters' early optimism with the disillusionment of reality and their experience. They were able to quote key extracts from dialogue to show the varieties of excuses for the refusal of work.
- (b) The passage dealing with the birth of Queenie's baby was very popular and candidates tended to write with enthusiasm and appreciation. Though some candidates' answers suggested that they thought the extract takes place in a hospital, most dealt effectively with the effects of Hortense's narrative voice and engaged with the descriptive detail with relish. Many recognised the way Levy creates humour in the passage through Hortense's perspective and concern for her dress, while there was some thoughtful reference to the significance of the scene in relation to the identity and fate of the baby. Essays often featured thoughtful discussion of Hortense's attempts to continue a formal relationship in desperate circumstances, with Queenie trying to break through the formality with her shouting, and the comic contrast between these attitudes. Several wrote well on the imagery of 'constipation', 'an erupting pustule' and 'a robust earthworm', used to describe the birth and the baby, showing Hortense's inexperience and revulsion, yet contrasted with words such as 'perfect', 'love' and 'miracle'. The passage offered a great deal and candidates' answers suggested that they enjoyed the opportunity to explore it.

Question 6 **Stories of Ourselves**

- (a) A wide range of appropriate stories was chosen in response to the question of characters who make an impact, though the question of what impact the characters make was less securely addressed by less confident candidates. Stronger candidates engaged with reader response, especially sympathy, as well as considering those characters from whom the reader might learn a moral lesson. *The Happy Prince* was popular in this regard, while candidates also wrote about empathy with the narrators of *The Taste of Watermelon* and *Sandpiper*, the fear inspired by the hag in *The Hollow of the Three Hills*, the pressures on the narrator's family in *Elephant*, the arrogance of the narrator of *How It Happened*, among others. There was clear discrimination between those essays which summarised the narrative and asserted that the characters had impact and those which were able to demonstrate how the authors' presentation of those characters created the impact.
- (b) Woolf's narrative style can be challenging and candidates who relied on narrative summary found this a perplexing passage. However, for candidates who were able to tease out the narrative perspective and style, this was a rich piece of writing which created opportunities for subtle analysis. The most confident noted Isabella's character and wrote carefully about how it is revealed by the narrative voice. They noted the idea of 'prizing her open', suggesting the hidden and the secret, while the concrete details from the first paragraph were often carefully noted, suggesting wealth, ease and a certain kind of social position. Other features identified included the use of the modal auxiliary 'must' to emphasise the mock urgency of the quest to find the 'real' Isabella and to invade the secrecy illustrated by the 'locked drawers' and the use of sun and cloud to veil her

thoughts. Such answers focused on the disillusion when the mysterious letters are revealed to be really only bills and the surface signs are rendered untrustworthy. Some candidates focused thoughtfully on the role of the mirror, reflecting inaccurately, and that the final paragraph suggests the perspective of a visual artist making an attempt at characterisation through what can be seen and known. Some successful responses linked this conscious narrative voice with modernism and stream of consciousness, demonstrating an awareness of the literary context.

Question 7 Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) Good responses found that this passage lent itself very well to an approach which blended analysis of stage directions with dialogue, leading to some perceptive engagement with Kate Keller's determination to control everyone's response and how that relates to her denial. These answers showed a good understanding of character and the effects created by the stage action, as well as the ability to contrast Kate's unwavering belief with the acceptance and realism displayed by Chris and Ann.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) Responses to this question were often constructed around a reasonable knowledge of the Lord Chief Justice on the one hand and Falstaff on the other, showing understanding of the way Prince Hal moves from one to the other. A substantial number of these, though, could have offered more analysis of the presentation of attitudes to law, rather than relying on accounts of plot and character.
- (b) Responding to the passage from Act 3 Scene 1, many candidates did not move far beyond an explanation of King Henry's speech, often not progressing much further than line 35. Stronger answers considered ways in which the language of his speech conveys his sense of disillusionment, with the initial appeal to God and the extended lament at the lack of foresight. His pessimism was noted, for example, in the contrast between 'happiest youth' and 'sit him down and die'. They noted the contrast between this and the reference to the deposed Richard II's prophecy, including Henry's self-justifying claim that he did not intend to take the throne until he 'and greatness were compell'd to kiss'. His anxiety was compared with Warwick's more philosophical tone. His reassurance and urge to 'comfort' Henry reinforces the audience's perception of the King's pessimistic and troubled state of mind.

Question 9 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) This question inspired some thoughtfully argued responses. While most considered the political dimension in colonial terms, some sophisticated essays argued that the cultural and social elements of the play can be considered political as they cannot be separated when dealing with colonialism. There was also interesting work on gender politics and how they differ between the Europeans and the indigenous population, while many candidates discussed the context of Nigeria at the time the play is set and the time in which it was written.
- (b) The passage proved popular, and nearly all candidates were aware of the significance of this moment in the play, looking carefully at the exchanges between the Praise-Singer and Elesin. There were many good discussions of the question and answer sequence which guides the ritual and of the metaphoric language and rhythm in the verse. Some candidates took the view that Elesin is sincere and committed in this passage, determined to fulfil his destiny, while others argued that there are indications in the speeches which suggest his later failure. Such responses argued that while he seems determined, references to food and to the 'tethering' sash suggest that Elesin's earthly pleasures will tie him to life.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/93
Poetry, Prose and Drama

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- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions examine the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail.
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In this series, there were some responses to every question on the poetry and prose texts, with the two Cambridge anthologies, *Songs of Ourselves* and *Stories of Ourselves*, *Small Island* and the poetry of Robert Frost being particularly popular choices. Owen Sheers' poetry, a new text, had an initially small take-up, but elicited some enthusiastic and thoughtful responses. Most candidates showed knowledge of the content and subject matter of their chosen texts, and most made at least some attempt to explore ways in which the writers communicate their concerns through choices of language, form and structure. The most successful were able to accomplish this with confidence, analysing detail to support their arguments. There were some examples of sophisticated and subtle writing.

Questions on specific questions

Question 1 Robert Frost: Selected Poems

- (a)** Some interesting arguments were developed to support the question's cue quotation, reflecting on how Frost uses nature to prompt moments of introspection in the speakers about both the natural world and the human condition. There were some especially perceptive comments on *There Are Roughly Zones*, *An Encounter*, *Mending Wall*, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* and *Two Look at Two*. The amount of accurate quotation used to support the argument was often very impressive, and there were also some welcome comments on form and structure. Less confident candidates wrote more generally about the battle between mankind and the natural world and there was some use of poems which were ill-suited to the question, including the extract printed for the (b) question.
- (b)** The strongest responses to the extract from *The Death of the Hired Man* dealt effectively with the dialogue, noting the way it allows Frost to offer two contrasting perspectives on Silas, as well as recognising that we do not hear from Silas himself. A number of essays noted his anonymity in the title of the poem, supporting a view of his ordinariness. Many answers were successful in showing how Mary and Warren's different views and reminiscences create a picture of Silas's attitudes and work. His dismissal of Harold's Latin and violin playing in preference for rural skills such as water-divining was noted, as well as his skill in loading, baling and tagging hay. The reader gains a balanced view and has to interpret between Mary's sympathy and Warren's dismissive aloofness. Alert candidates pointed out that the reader's interpretation of Silas is therefore guided by Frost's presentation of Mary and Warren, noting the angelic portrayal of Mary, with 'light poured softly',

'harplike' and 'played unheard' as well as her empathetic attitude to Silas seen in 'I know just how it feels' and 'poor Silas'. Many commented on the parallel phrasing of her poignant summing up of Silas' life in ll.30–31. However, the passage also attracted much misreading. A number of candidates lost sight of which speaker is speaking, there was confusion between Silas and Harold, and ll.24–25 were often misinterpreted, arguing that Silas foolishly tried to 'lift himself', missing the 'never' in the previous line.

Question 2 Owen Sheers: *Skirrid Hill*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) While most candidates responded to this poem as one of devoted love through the metaphor of the trapped magpie being sustained by the speaker, it also offered some interesting variant interpretations. There were some suggestions that the magpie in the cage has, like a Siren, trapped the speaker into constant attendance at the cage. Others argued that the apparent devotion of the speaker has a sinister undercurrent, noting such phrases as 'let you walk' and 'I will be waiting' at the end of the poem. Attention was also drawn to the female bird being associated with words like 'bait', 'trap', and 'cage' while the male can 'spread' his wings. These answers also considered the darker imagery of the poem, like the 'oil spill', 'darkness of your eye', 'wings on wire' and 'wring their lives away'. A number of candidates commented on the poem's tercets, a favoured Sheers structure, though fewer noticed the quatrain of the final stanza which adds greater emphasis to the final line.

Question 3 *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*

- (a) Poems chosen for this question were usually well selected, with *If Thou Must Love Me*, *Sonnet 19*, Wroth's *Song* and *The Pride of Lions* being particularly popular. Candidates chose poems which allowed them to explore contrasting perceptions of love and its effects. Where the essays only compared the nature of love through paraphrase and summary, candidates had limited success. Those who knew their chosen poems well and were able to quote from them and use the analysis to support the argument, produced thoughtful and confident essays. There was some comparison of Browning's and Shakespeare's use of the sonnet form, while Wroth's use of personification and metaphor was compared with Preston's more sensual and carnal metaphor of the lion.
- (b) There were some very perceptive and thoughtful responses to this question which traced the development of ideas through the sonnet. Using the key words 'mood and atmosphere' from the question, many candidates noted various auditory effects, like the use of assonance ('huge', 'brood', 'mute') and sibilance and alliteration ('repercussive...drowsy billows', 'rugged...rocks remote'). Many commented also on the other sounds in the poem, from the initial silence to the 'roar' of the waves, the 'distant tone' of sailors and the 'deep voice' and the bell which ends the octet. There was also discussion of the lack of sight through both the 'vapors' and the darkness, which render the world uncertain and indistinct and put the emphasis on what is heard. Candidates discussed an intimidating mood of isolation, with the ship distanced from the speaker beyond the 'rocks remote' but few engaged fully with the last four lines and many ignored the final couplet altogether. Though the deceptiveness of the 'wandering fairy fires' was sometimes noted, few linked them with the failing lights of 'wavering Reason' and the resulting pessimism about 'life's long darkling way'.

Question 4 E M Forster: *Howards End*

- (a) Many candidates viewed Leonard Bast as a sympathetic character who is a victim of the class system. His attempts to develop cultural interests were discussed, often in reference to the concert where he meets the Schlegels. His lost umbrella was also seen as a symbolic representation of the class differences, in that he has only one and values it, whereas Helen has many and describes his as 'appalling'. His interest in art and books was also commented on, with candidates commenting on the ironic cause of his death at the hands of Charles Wilcox. Leonard's failing fortunes as a result of Henry Wilcox's advice was explored in some responses as a key part of his presentation and role in the novel. Apart from being part of Forster's critique of the class structure, some candidates saw Leonard's role as a linking mechanism between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. From a chance meeting at the Queen's Hall concert to the revelation of Henry Wilcox's association

with Jacky, Leonard's story is interwoven with theirs, affecting their perceptions of each other and, as several candidates pointed out, leaving behind a child who will live the life to which he had aspired.

- (b) Candidates showed good knowledge of the two characters, and were able to deal with the contrasting perspectives they present. However, in many cases the eagerness to write about the characters in a more general sense sometimes meant that the nuances of the writing of the passage were unexplored. More confident candidates looked closely at the way Forster characterises Mrs Wilcox in particular here, with analysis of ll.13–16 especially fruitful. Most responses identified Margaret's perspective within the narrative voice in parts of the extract and useful contrasts were drawn between the two characters in terms of their attitude to shopping – Margaret's list-making as opposed to Ruth Wilcox 'hopelessly' suggesting two shops. Several candidates saw Margaret's name at the top of the list as foreshadowing the gift of Howards End later in the novel as was Mrs Wilcox's desire to give Margaret 'something worth your acquaintance'. Margaret's business-like approach to friendship was commented on – her desire to 'book Mrs Wilcox as a friend' and 'settle up' as opposed to Ruth Wilcox's languid attitude – she 'took her time' and 'refused to fit in', her 'vitality was low' and she was 'apt to brood'. A few candidates noted the inauspicious start to the expedition, with references to 'crisis', 'cheerless', and 'fog may thicken', possibly suggesting ominous developments later in the novel. In contrasting the two characters, the last two sentences of the passage were often overlooked, although the word 'vulgarity' offered much to discuss in the context of the question.

Question 5 **Andrea Levy: *Small Island***

- (a) Candidates wrote many clear and sensible answers on Gilbert. Candidates had a good grasp of his character and role, although some turned this into a more general essay on racial inequality. Most candidates wrote lucidly about Gilbert's nature, his difficulties, his sense of humour and his role in marrying Hortense and sustaining their lives in England. Candidates often referred to specific episodes, such as his encounters with racial discrimination and moments with Hortense. Often these were recalled in impressive detail, with supporting quotations. In other answers, there was much on the plot, but less analysis of Levy's organisation and structure of the novel and her use of Gilbert's narrative voice.
- (b) This was a very popular question, with most responses identifying the way in which Hortense's narration positions readers to share her experiences but also allows them to see her faulty perception of the events, particularly in relation to Michael. Most candidates discussed the descriptions of the hurricane's destructive power, with some citing the hyperbolic comparison of the 'rock of ages' to a 'bird's wing'. Many candidates explored the symbolic significance of the hurricane in the extract and in the novel as a whole, especially concerning the character of Michael and his effect on female characters such as Hortense, Mrs Ryder and Queenie. Some, however, spent so much time developing the metaphor of the hurricane that they neglected the actual hurricane in the passage. Most responses usefully compared Hortense's and Mrs Ryder's reactions to the impending hurricane, noting that Levy describes Hortense 'bolting shutters', 'securing doors' and 'praying that 'the schoolhouse roof would stand firm' while Mrs Ryder 'skipped like a giddy girl' and combed her hair. One or two candidates commented on the irony of Mrs Ryder's desire to 'stand in a hurricane to feel the force of God's power' when it causes her husband's death. Hortense's mistaken belief that Michael had come to support her was discussed by most candidates. Her appreciation of his physicality, with the sensual description of his shirt which 'cleaved to the muscles of his body', was seen as blinding her to his true purpose by some candidates. Hortense's inability to see the truth was further explored when towards the end of the extract Michael pushes her 'not gently' and addresses Mrs Ryder as Stella.

Question 6 ***Stories of Ourselves***

- (a) For the question on characters' past, candidates wrote most often about *Elephant*, *The Hollow of the Three Hills* and *The Door in the Wall*. These stories were appropriately chosen and often discussed with some detailed knowledge, though many candidates focused more on what the characters' past was, rather than how the writer makes it important in the narrative. Stronger responses took note of how the reader learns of the past in each of the stories. In each of these stories, candidates noted how the past is gradually built up from references within the narrative and how they allow the reader to interpret the story, gaining more understanding as it progresses. In

this way, the various stories about the history and relationships of the narrator in *Elephant* give the reason for the pressures on him and the need to escape; the three visions given to the young woman in *The Hollow of the Three Hills* gradually reveal her history and the reasons for her interview with the hag; the accumulating references to the narrator's childhood in *The Door in the Wall* allow the reader to understand his need for escape and invite interpretation of his garden vision.

- (b) More successful responses to this popular passage discussed the first person narrative and structural features, such as the differing sentence lengths (ll.35–40) which help to create the dramatic effect of the narrator's experience. Some also commented on how, even in the midst of the disaster, the narrator appreciated the quality of his car, describing it as a 'majestic sight' and a 'great, roaring, golden death', which for some showed his arrogance and sense of superiority, not to mention his lack of concern for Perkins. Some candidates also explored the way tension is increased in the opening paragraph of the extract, with the four difficult stages to be negotiated by the driver – three 'curves' and the gate – being marked out for the reader. The dialogue also received attention from some candidates with some responses seeing it as Conan Doyle's way of magnifying the drama and excitement. Others saw it as a way of revealing Perkins' character in his attempts to save his master's life at the expense of his own. Most candidates recognised line 40 as signalling a change in the narrator's experiences. Phrases such as 'a man in a dream', 'giddy and shaken' were identified as showing the narrator's altered perception of the world around him. The subsequent dialogue was explored by most in terms of its gradual revelation of the narrator's death. The calm aura, particularly in relation to the appearance of Stanley in the final paragraphs was noted by many, using words and phrases such as 'smiling', 'gentle and wistful', 'soothing' and 'light and happy'. Some candidates referred at this point to Conan Doyle's interest in spiritualism and the afterlife. Some candidates showed their awareness that a story narrated by a dead person might strain the credibility of the modern reader. There was also ample discussion of the class system, with comments on the narrator's arrogance and Perkins' servile loyalty throughout.

Question 7 Arthur Miller: *All My Sons*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make any general comments on performance.
- (b) Candidates showed a good awareness of George's role, increasing the tension about the past in the play. They noted his sense of urgency in the stage direction 'breathlessly' and his emotional language – 'we did a terrible thing. We can never be forgiven.' Strong essays showed a keen awareness of the significance of his revelations about the fault with the cylinder heads, Joe Keller's instructions then sudden illness. The force of his challenge to his sister Ann in ll.35–36 was noted and Chris's violent response to George's speeches was also recognised as a key part of Miller's presentation of the impact of his revelations. Many candidates picked up on his references to 'court', 'appeal' and 'you can always deny a phone call' and made the point that part of his threat to the Keller family is his profession as a lawyer. Close attention to the language of the dialogue and the stage directions produced strong answers.

Question 8 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 2*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make any general comments on performance.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make any general comments on performance.

Question 9 Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King's Horseman*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to make any general comments on performance.
- (b) There were too few responses to this question to make any general comments on performance.