ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1120/01
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- read both passages closely
- followed task instructions carefully
- demonstrated the different skills required by each question, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension and **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language
- avoided unselective copying from the texts
- paid attention to the marks and space available for each question which indicate the detail needed
- made valid inferences about a character's feelings based on textual details for **Question 1(h)**
- copied out a precise quotation from the text for **Question 1(h)** as a text detail rather than providing a paraphrase
- organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(e)** and **Question 2(e)**
- used their own words when instructed
- kept to a recommended word limit
- checked their responses.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for the most part, were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a response is incorrect, a line should be drawn across it. Writing over an answer which has been erased results in illegibility. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page and not write their answers on any blank page or in any blank space in the question booklet which may be easily missed.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, a narrative text called *The puma*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each sub-question. Candidates seemed to find the text accessible with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

Several candidates performed very well on **Question 1**, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Where marks were lost, it was often because the text was copied and thus their response was not clearly focused on the question.

While candidates were successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences was often more challenging**.** This was particularly evident in **Question 1(h)**. Candidates could identify details from the text about Laura's response to working at the sanctuary, but making sensible inferences about how she felt about working there proved more difficult. Candidates would benefit from further practice of reading literary texts and considering the feelings of individual characters.

Question 2 was less successfully answered. Sometimes **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used as is the intention of this question. Candidates should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal

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details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. **Question 2** asked for an *effect* (in **Question 2(d)**), an *impression* (in **Questions 2(c)** and **2(e)**) and what is being *suggested* (in **Question 2(a)**). This means that repeating or paraphrasing the words from the specified extract is insufficient for an explanation of how language works. No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

Question 3 was based on the shorter second passage, **Text B**, *Going at my own pace*. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words in candidates' own words. This selective summary required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the task, as outlined in **Question 3(a)**, and to do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)**. This means that to reach Writing Levels 3, 4 and 5, ideas had to be communicated clearly. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In Reading, some candidates found it difficult to separate irrelevant content from content which would have helped them fulfil the task.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. To achieve a high mark, these ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that candidates do not have lengthy introductions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Comprehension

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A. These are short answers worth a total of 16 marks which test understanding of both explicit and implicit meanings.

(a) In paragraph 1, what evidence is there that Laura knew very little about wild cats before she arrived at the sanctuary?

This first question was answered successfully by many candidates who selected the detail in the final sentence that Laura did not know what a puma looks like. Any answer which included detail about the monkeys could not be credited since this did not evidence careful selection. The question directed candidates to paragraph 1. Candidates, therefore, must not select their answer from the italicised introduction or any section of the text outside of paragraph 1.

(b) Using your own words, explain what Laura means when she describes the bus journey as 'rumbling along in a rickety bus.' (line 3)

In **Question 1(b)**, the rubric made it clear that use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of both 'rumbling' and 'rickety' in the context of the bus journey. Successful answers offered creditworthy meanings for both words, such as noisy or slow for 'rumbling', and old, uncomfortable or bumpy for 'rickety'. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was usually the result of having explained just one part of the phrase, such as giving two meanings for the same word such as 'slow' and 'noisy' for 'rumbling'. Answers which identified the road surface as bumpy were incorrect since the focus had to be on the 'rickety *bus'* rather than on the condition of the road.

(c) From paragraph 2, identify two reasons why it is difficult for Laura to see through the bus window.

Several responses recognised that Laura's vision was obscured by the *grimy* windows which were covered in *condensation* and scored two marks. Some answers were in candidates' own words such as dirty, unclean, steamed up or covered in mist. Some candidates were distracted by the crowded bus and incorrectly suggested that the other passengers and their belongings made it difficult for Laura to see.

(d) Explain what Laura is thinking when she asks the bus driver 'Seriously?' (line 7)

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This inferential question required understanding of what went through Laura's mind at that moment when she was expected to disembark at an empty road surrounded by jungle. Thus, candidates needed to consider the word *Seriously* in context and those who did provided successful responses capturing Laura's fear, confusion, disbelief or surprise, such as 'she could not believe this was the place' or 'he could not really be leaving her here'. Some responses were in the form of a question, and this was also acceptable: 'Is this really the place?' Focus on the bus driver could also score with 'she thinks the driver was joking' or 'he was fooling her'. To simply state what was happening was incorrect so 'the driver was leaving her on an empty road' could not score, and nor could any suggestion that 'Seriously?' referred to the state of the bus, the journey or the passengers.

(e) In paragraph 3, how does Laura feel about being in the jungle when she first arrives? Give two details from the text to support your answer.

The first task for one mark was to infer how Laura *felt* about being in the jungle when she first arrived. A range of responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of Laura feeling uneasy, overwhelmed or scared. This meant that answers such as uncomfortable, anxious and lost could score. Feelings which were too general or vague, such as bad, unhappy or negative, were not creditworthy, nor were feelings which focused specifically on the 'annoying' or 'irritating' mosquitoes.

The second task for two marks was to provide two supporting *details* from the text. These details could be copied, such as 'struggle to breathe', or *precisely* paraphrased as 'she has trouble breathing'. It is important that the details are not repetition so having identified the 'vastness' of the jungle, a response could not gain two marks if 'the jungle is everywhere' was offered as the second detail. The detail must support a relevant feeling: there is nothing in 'tall trees overhang the banks' to suggest unease for example. If two correct supporting details were given with an incorrect feeling, only one mark was awarded.

(f) Identify two things the monkey does to make Laura think that he is 'challenging' her. (line 15)

This explicit comprehension question was answered well and those who read the question carefully and focused on the actions of the monkey (what 'the monkey *does*') – he 'sat on a sign' and 'stared' – rather than Laura's reaction ('I yelp and leap back') achieved two marks.

(g) (i) In paragraph 5, when a huge black boar suddenly appears, Laura notices something surprising about her. What is surprising about the boar?

This explicit comprehension question was also successfully answered. Most responses recognised that the red sock in the boar's mouth surprised Laura. It was also correct to identify the fact that Laura would have been surprised to hear the boar was called 'Rita', though fewer candidates gave this as their answer.

(ii) Why does the boar run away from the man?

The second part of **Question 1(g)** required inference and was more challenging. A minority of candidates realised that it was likely that the boar had stolen the sock from the man and that he was chasing her to retrieve it, but identifying just that the man was chasing the boar or that he wanted his sock was sufficient. Some responses erroneously stated that 'twigs and leaves' were being removed from the boar. Speculation that the boar ran away because the man was a vet and because she was scared of him was not creditworthy.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a) – (g):

- read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words
- check how many marks are allocated to each question
- read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer
- if there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on
- avoid lengthy copying from the text
- carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.

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(h) Explain using your own words Laura's different feelings about working at an animal sanctuary in South America.
Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.

Question 1(h) was a three-mark question which focused on the character of Laura. The first task was to explain in candidates' own words Laura's different feelings about working at an animal sanctuary. Candidates needed to select those sections relevant to the question ('working at an animal sanctuary'). This means that sections of the text referring to the bus journey, the empty road, the monkey and the boar were not relevant and should be ignored.

Three feelings are required, and responses covered a range of relevant feelings, such as confused, uncomfortable, hopeful, scared and happy, thus demonstrating secure understanding. The question asks for 'different' feelings so 'scared', 'panicking' and 'anxious' could only score one mark since these feelings are too similar.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting textual details (three quotations) to provide evidence for Laura's three different feelings. One text detail in the form of a quotation copied from the text is required for each feeling. Some examples of correct responses to **Question 1(h)** follow:

– *Laura feels confused: 'I stare at her dumbly'*
– *She is nervous when she sees Wayra – 'I stay very, very still'*
– *Mila's 'thrillingly contagious' smile shows that Laura is becoming excited*
– *'Some fear, the top layer blows away' shows Laura now feels confident.*

Some responses included an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Laura's feelings and supported each one with appropriate detail from the text. Candidates are advised to set out their responses clearly, with each feeling and corresponding supporting detail clearly identified.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing can all too easily result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail. For example, 'Laura was scared *when she first saw the puma'* is too vague to be credited as a paraphrase of 'I stay, very, very still'.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences about feelings. These responses were characterised by lifting and narrative rather than own word explanations of Laura's feelings. For example, a response which reads 'Laura stays still when she sees the puma' is a text detail which narrates the events and makes no observation about her feelings. The addition of an appropriate identified feeling, for example, 'Laura feels scared' would have made this a successful response.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):

- identify the sections of the text and the character which are relevant to the question
- consider the different feelings of the character in these sections
- use own words to describe three different feelings
- select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation
- make sure the supporting text detail is clear, relevant and not overlong
- present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail
- prepare for this question by reading literary texts and describing the feelings of characters
- build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

Question 2 Use of Language

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

(a) Read this extract from the text:
'I'd probably feel more sad about this if there was not one huge question pounding my brain.
I whisper it to Mila who does not answer at first.
'Maybe,' she finally says.' (lines 47 – 50)

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What does the writer want to suggest to the reader about what Mila and Laura are about to do?

Candidates who performed well on this question acknowledged that, as a **Question 2** sub-question, this was not testing comprehension but the effect of language. They also demonstrated understanding of the suggestion that Laura and Mila were about to do something dangerous, risky or frightening since they were going to release the puma from her cage. Responses such as 'they were going to walk the puma' did not focus on what was being *suggested* and were not creditworthy.

(b) Explain why the writer uses the word 'each' rather than 'both' in the expression 'But we each have to decide whether we think these animals are worth it.' (lines 50 – 51)

Several responses recognised the implication of 'each' to suggest that the decision made about working with dangerous animals had to be independent or personal, and answers such as 'Laura had to decide alone'; 'they may think differently'; and 'she has her own point of view' were creditworthy. Candidates who effectively repeat the question are not demonstrating understanding of language use and so 'they each had to make a decision', for example, could not score.

(c) What <u>two</u> impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader about the puma in the sentence:

'But then her long tail whips and I glimpse the only parts of her that stand out: her eyes, as green as the paddle-shaped plants surrounding us, and her nose, pink as the tip of a sunset.' (lines 53 – 55)?

Two different ideas drawn from anywhere in the extract above could score. Successful responses avoided repeating the words in the extract. For example, the extract tells us that the puma's eyes and nose are the colours of plants and sunsets respectively. Perceptive responses recognised that these are both images of nature with 'she is part of nature' or 'she belongs in the jungle, not in a cage'. Less secure responses simply repeated the words – 'her nose is pink like a sunset' – without an analysis of their effect. Many responses correctly recognised that these images also created an impression of beauty and that the puma was magnificent and captivating.

Candidates need to focus on individual words in the extract. The impression of a puma which is fierce or dangerous is suggested by the comparison of the tail to a 'whip', while the word 'glimpse' gives the impression that the puma is seen briefly and is mysterious.

While it is useful to consider the extract in context, some responses referred to the preceding sentence. The puma is 'hard to spot' or difficult to see in the shadows are not impressions created by the specified extract. The impression created in the extract in the question is that her features are prominent or that her eyes and nose are brightly coloured and noticeable against her dark fur.

(d) Read this sentence from the text:
'A real-life Wayra has materialised in the doorway.' (line 57)
What effect does the writer suggest about Wayra by using the word 'materialised' to describe the way she has moved?

Candidates needed to provide two *effects* of the use of the word 'materialised'. Success here depended on understanding the meaning of the word 'materialised' in context. Responses had to recognise that 'materialised' captured both the speed at which the puma moved, and the fact that the puma appeared, revealed herself or was simply there. Examples of answers which gained two marks: 'she revealed herself suddenly'; 'she appeared out of the blue'; 'she was just there'; and 'she teleported'. It was also correct to write 'she appeared as if by magic'.

(e) Identify <u>one example</u> of how the writer uses language effectively to describe Wayra in this extract from the text:

'I stay very, very still, transfixed by her bristling tail, the tense snake of her spine, her low growl. A pause. Then – she's away! Erupting from the cage.
'Come!' Mila grabs my hand. 'We go in front – to protect her.'
Protect her? Wayra turns, shooting me a look of disgust. There's tension on the rope; she's reached as far as she can get. Her growl has got louder, an engine deep in her belly. It was

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an illusion before – her size, thinking she was not big. I realise she had not looked small in the cage; she'd looked squashed. Now, outside, she's expanded. Princess Wayra.' (lines 58 – 65)

Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.

Example

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write this example and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'Erupting from the cage' or 'Now, outside, she's expanded', but too often the example selected was excessively long. An example must be carefully chosen since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. For example, not much could be said about the quotations 'her low growl' or 'thinking she was not big' so these were unwise choices. Sometimes a single image, such as 'Princess', might work, but generally selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. Ellipses and line references were sometimes offered but these are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the words in the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as personification. The question places the focus on the description of Wayra. This means quotations about Laura or Mila, such as 'I stay very, very still' or '"Come!" Mila grabs my hand', were not acceptable.

Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example and two marks were available for this part of the question. An explanation had to be written in candidates' own words to demonstrate secure understanding. Several candidates scored at least one mark for the explanation.

Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the quotation. For example, some candidates who selected 'Erupting from the cage' likened the puma's release to an explosive volcano which is dangerous – thus concisely providing two ideas for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'Princess Wayra' with candidates commenting on her majestic appearance and power – again, two clear observations scoring two marks. Both these examples demonstrate the effective practice of candidates zooming in on individual words ('erupting' and 'Princess') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

There is no credit for naming technical language features such as 'metaphor', but credit can be given for an explanation which successfully describes the effect of a feature or device. For example, the effect of suspense and speed is created by the full stop and dash in 'A pause. Then – she's away!'

Less successful explanations were characterised by a repetition of the language in the extract. For example, 'Her growl has got louder, an engine deep in her belly', was repeated in the explanation with 'her growl is like a loud engine'. A successful response would have focused on the effect of the central comparison – that she is like a machine, she is full of energy and is angry.

Candidates' explanations must only focus on the example they have selected. If a candidate has selected 'she'd look squashed', the explanation must focus on this specific image of the puma being crammed or squeezed into a cage which is cruel and unnatural. Less effective explanations discussed how she looked small but in reality is big which is not an idea that originates from the image in the selected example.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly
- consider the meaning of a word before going on to consider what it suggests and its effect
- zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments
- think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words
- use your own words to explain effect
- if a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things
- practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

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Section B

Question 3

(a) Summary task

Summarise the disadvantages of the fitness app, according to Text B.

You must use continuous writing (not note form).
Use your own words as far as possible.
Avoid copying long sections of the text.
Your summary should be no more than 150 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 10 marks for the quality of your writing.

In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: the disadvantages of the fitness app. Successful responses focused on the task and selected a wide range of relevant points and *used* these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored details about how the app works, its benefits and personal trainers – all of which were irrelevant to the task. Several relevant content points were easily identified by most candidates. The more straightforward content points included the app costs money, is addictive and causes the battery to run down. Some content points proved less accessible, requiring careful selection and attention to detail, for example, recognising that a disadvantage was not just having to run faster, but rather having to run *too* fast or to overtrain. Similarly, leaving comments alone is not a disadvantage; it is the fact that these comments are sometimes mean which is the point being made in the text.

Weaker responses were characterised by irrelevance; these sometimes relied too heavily on lifting sections of text, including dialogue, rather than selecting and presenting the key ideas economically and concisely. Some summaries opened with four or five lines explaining how an app works before mentioning any disadvantage. This is not careful or skilful selection. The summary needed to identify disadvantages explicitly stated in Text B and must not include personal opinion, advice or evaluation. Some weaker summaries included invented material such as the danger of strangers accessing personal details or compared a fitness app with a personal trainer.

Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as ‘monthly subscription’, but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as ‘without consent’ for ‘whether you want it to or not’. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style, changing the first person in the text to the third person.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries could not achieve above Levels 1 or 2.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as ‘an addiction to the competitive app removes all fun’. Avoiding lengthy introductions and conclusions also helped achieve concision.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation

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that was accurate and helpful. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover' and 'likewise' correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses also demonstrated use of adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'in addition' to shape the content, though when overused and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, these did not necessarily aid organisation. Candidates should write formally in summary writing. This means avoiding phrases such as 'in the same vein', 'on the flip side' or 'on top of that'. At the lower levels, summaries lacked clarity due to errors in grammar, awkward expression and little evidence of organising the content.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a):

Reading

- first read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content
- read the question and make sure that you understand the task
- read the text again, underlining or highlighting the words and phrases which are relevant to the task
- ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations and examples
- do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail
- do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content
- look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point
- do not include content which is not in the text.

Writing

- think of a sensible order for the points underlined/highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text
- if points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision
- use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary
- do not lift whole phrases or sentences
- write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures
- connect your ideas so that they flow smoothly for the reader from one point to the next
- use a formal writing style
- do not write more than 150 words
- do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) Short response task

Imagine you are Ned, the writer's personal trainer.
You are asked a question by someone who enjoys running and is interested in your work.
Give your answer to the runner's question, using information from the text.

The runner's question: I've been thinking of getting a personal trainer, but some people say it's a waste of money.
What is your opinion and why?

In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B**. They have to demonstrate that they can understand a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear that the perspective candidates are to take is Ned, a personal trainer, and the text makes it clear that he disagrees with the statement.

This question is testing reading skills. It is about a personal trainer and not a fitness app. The relevant information about personal trainers is in the references to Ned throughout **Text B** where we learn that, for example, a personal trainer can give advice about eating healthily and ensure that one does not overtrain. Candidates who performed well in this question returned to the text, specifically the sections where Ned is mentioned, and considered what might be the benefits of having a personal trainer.

To reach Level 3, a response had to consistently demonstrate the correct perspective supported by *detail* from the *text*, such as 'I'd make sure you never overtrain', and *develop* this with sensible inference: 'this will

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ensure you avoid serious injury'. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the task or the text, often writing about the advantages and disadvantages of a personal trainer or including criticism of a fitness app. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of the correct perspective: 'I think you should get a personal trainer', but were then either very brief or did not include relevant content.

Some candidates misread the question, confusing a personal trainer with a fitness app, or agreed that a personal trainer was a waste of money and that the runner should train independently. These responses gained no marks.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):

- read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to identify with
- highlight or underline the relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned
- decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if they agree or disagree with the statement
- state an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text
- extend and develop the ideas with inference.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1120/02
Paper 2 Writing

Key messages

- In ***Section A***, candidates should take care to use their own words when selecting ideas from the given texts.
- In ***Section A***, candidates should be encouraged to use evaluative and developmental language, using, for example, discourse markers and persuasive devices.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the majority of responses.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and more varied punctuation (colons, semi-colons, brackets, question marks and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses.
- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible and that where material is crossed out, a line is drawn through it neatly.
- Candidates should be encouraged to plan and paragraph their responses to improve organisation and clarity.
- In ***Section B***, candidates should ensure that they use features appropriate to the type of writing required by the question selected and focus on writing for deliberate effect.
- In ***Section B***, when choosing **Questions 2** or **3**, candidates should maintain a focus on description and avoiding slipping into narrative. If **Questions 4** or **5** are chosen, candidates should ensure plots are fully developed and brought to a meaningful conclusion.
- When writing dialogue, care should be taken to ensure that this is punctuated and formatted correctly.
- Candidates should focus on quality over quantity in their ***Section B*** response, being mindful to adhere closely to the indicative word count.

General comments

Most candidates produced responses of an appropriate length and adhered to the rubric. Only a small number of candidates left sections incomplete or produced responses significantly below the indicative word count.

Candidates responded well to the Reading requirements in ***Section A***, reflecting an understanding of and an engagement with the texts. However, a significant minority struggled to structure their responses and develop their ideas effectively, particularly when integrating and evaluating the source texts (**Text A** and **Text B**). Strong responses were characterised by effective paraphrasing and well-considered, while in weaker responses, there was frequent lifting of phrases directly from the source texts and evaluation was either superficial or absent. Most responses were clear and legible. However, some responses were difficult to read due to poor handwriting, untidy crossings-out and inconsistent use of capital letters.

Most candidates opted for narrative questions (**Question 4** and **Question 5**) in ***Section B***, and these were generally well answered. The descriptive questions (**Question 2** and **Question 3**) were less frequently chosen and often weaker in execution. Many of these responses lacked descriptive features, such as imagery, focus shifts, or atmosphere creation, though more successful responses were strong in this regard. Occasionally, responses to ***Section B*** were overly long, with a few up to ten pages, far exceeding the indicative word count and resulting in a less successful response in quality terms.

Several recurring issues impacted the clarity and effectiveness of responses. A common issue was tense inconsistency, with responses sometimes switching between past and present tense within sentences, causing confusion for the reader. In some cases, responses shifted between first and third-person perspectives without clear intent. Punctuation errors, particularly the punctuation of dialogue, and disorganised paragraphing were other notable weaknesses. More successful responses featured impressive vocabulary and the effective use of literary devices, such as imagery and plot twists.

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Section A

General comments

In ***Section A***, the Reading requirements of the question were addressed well by most candidates. The question required them to read **Text A** and **Text B** about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones from which ideas and opinions were to be selected and subsequently developed and evaluated in an email to the school principal to assist him/her in deciding whether or not to ban mobile phones in school. All candidates appeared familiar with the benefits and drawbacks of having mobile phones in school and as such were able to engage with the material provided. While the majority of candidates selected a wide range of ideas from the texts and offered development of some or all of these, a few responses with thoughtful evaluation selected only a few ideas and were therefore less successful than they could have been had a greater range of ideas been discussed. Additionally, there were some candidates who, despite having selected a suitable *range* of ideas, did not offer any evaluation and, as such, precluded themselves from attaining marks in Levels 4 and 5. This highlights the need for candidates to balance breadth of ideas chosen with depth of development and evaluation in their responses.

Responses generally demonstrated a good understanding of the required text type and audience, with the majority correctly adopting the format of a formal email addressed to the principal. A respectful tone was maintained throughout for the most part, though a few responses included some overly familiar or colloquial language. Most responses opened with a polite and focused introduction, stating the purpose of the email, though many ended somewhat abruptly, without reference to the principal. Appropriate valedictions were provided in most responses; these ranged from the simple and polite 'Thank you' to the respectful and not overly formal 'Kind regards', through to those with a shade of deference, such as 'Yours respectfully'.

In terms of structure, many responses discussed the points for and against the proposed ban on mobile phones in separate sections before concluding with the candidate's view. While many responses followed this sequential approach, stronger responses skilfully integrated ideas from both texts, juxtaposing them to create more evaluative and cohesive arguments. This integrated approach allowed for more nuanced analysis and showed higher-level skills in balancing and evaluating competing ideas.

Reference to **Text A** and **Text B** was made in many responses, with some responses directly quoting Hamza and Rachna. More successful responses demonstrated an ability to go beyond merely citing the texts, instead developing their arguments with personal examples and additional insights, such as the implications of cyberbullying, gaming, and the health issues associated with too much time spent using mobile phones. Successful responses also employed powerful adjectives and evaluative phrases (e.g., 'this is undoubtedly true,' 'this is the most important factor'), to enhance the persuasiveness of their arguments. However, these techniques were not widespread, and most candidates relied heavily on factual presentation rather than rhetorical persuasion.

Most responses adopted an appropriate formality and a clear organisational structure. Paragraphing was mostly effective, and spelling and vocabulary were generally strong, with occasional ambitious vocabulary choices. Punctuation within sentences was less consistent, and some responses lacked sentence variety, limiting the fluency of the writing. Despite these issues, the majority of responses were clear and coherent.

The most successful responses were those which combined a formal tone, structured arguments, evaluative insight, and well-developed personal input, achieving a balance between analysis and creativity. Key areas for improvement would therefore include integrating ideas more effectively, enhancing evaluative skills, and providing more extensive development of the ideas selected from the source texts. The use of persuasive devices would further strengthen responses.

Reading

Most candidates demonstrated a solid understanding of the source texts. Most responses included relevant ideas which were clearly presented, ensuring a balance of ideas across both texts. However, a recurring issue was the tendency to lift phrases or ideas directly from the texts without sufficient rephrasing or interpretation. Where this was the case, it limited the originality and depth of the response.

Almost all responses covered a wide range of ideas, with very few limiting themselves to a single text. Most addressed both texts methodically, showcasing an understanding of the topic and the arguments presented. Responses often discussed the advantages of mobile phones for organisation and research, offering developments such as using phones to take pictures of lesson notes and having access to the most up to

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date information. Most responses also referenced the idea of responsibility being inculcated by the possession of a mobile phone, with more successful responses making a link between this and the idea of envy from Text B through the mention of the expense of mobile phones. This linking of advantages and disadvantages taken from opposing texts is to be encouraged. Of the five ideas present in Text A, that of photography or hobbies was least frequently selected. Of the five disadvantages present in Text B, that of addiction was the most frequently omitted while points around the potential for distraction and for limiting creativity, were widely addressed. Several candidates offered lack of focus in class *and* accidents caused outside of class when candidates' attention is absorbed by their phones as separate ideas, however these were both part of one single idea of distraction. When selecting ideas from the texts, candidates should look for these overarching ideas, rather than reiterating every example provided.

Development of ideas was present in most responses and was often offered by candidates in the form of an example or information additional to an idea already in one of the source texts. One example of this took the form of personal evidence which supported an idea, for example, 'Having my phone with me helps me to feel safe because it means that if I have a problem, such as missing the bus, I can call my parents and they can come and pick me up which means I do not have to walk home on my own'. We also saw examples where the development of an idea came before the idea itself, for example, 'When I have my phone in school, I am often tempted to play games or look at Instagram, which means I do not focus on what the teacher is saying.' where the personal experience is used as a lead in to the idea from Text B of mobile phones being distracting. This is a perfectly valid approach.

Many responses featured creditworthy evaluation, for example, 'Using a mobile phone provides crucial safety for students by allowing instant communication in emergencies, so rather than banning mobile phones, perhaps it would be better to only allow their use at certain times of the day, for example on the journey to and from school when students are more likely to be at risk.' or 'The high cost of mobile phones undoubtedly causes jealousy among students when they don't have the latest model and making sure their children always have the most up to date phone can place financial strain on families.' In the first example, we have evaluation of the idea that mobile phones provide safety, with the use of 'crucial' being a signal that this is evaluative. The development provided here is a solution which supports the evaluation by mentioning that permitting the use of mobile phones on the way to and from school would offer security in emergency situations. The second example picks up on the Text B idea of envy, judging that there is validity in this idea with the use of 'undoubtedly'. The development here comes with the effect of the expense on families.

Some candidates had clearly understood that evaluation required offering judgement of an idea present in the texts either by suggesting prioritization of one idea over another, or dismissal of an idea. Some responses featured appropriate vocabulary to support an evaluation, with phrases such as 'the most important factor', 'It is certainly true', 'I can't deny', 'we can't completely ignore the fact' and 'It is claimed'. However, while most responses presented a view on whether or not mobile phones should be banned in school, the depth and clarity of evaluations varied significantly. Weaker responses either omitted evaluation altogether or resorted to recycling ideas from the source texts without genuine analysis. Conversely, more accomplished responses prioritised and critiqued ideas, often embedding evaluative comments throughout, contrasting points between the texts and weighing their persuasiveness. For example, some candidates debated the usefulness of mobile phones for research against the risk of distraction, providing thoughtful analysis. However, these responses were rare. More often, where evaluation was attempted, it was confined to concluding paragraphs and lacked integration throughout the response. Weaker responses often included implicit or incidental evaluation, rather than explicitly signalled critical analysis. For instance, while ideas were dismissed or disagreed with, these dismissals were not always substantiated. Some responses refrained from offering a definitive view, instead leaving the decision to the principal. While this approach acknowledged the authority of the principal, it often resulted in a lack of purposeful tone.

To improve performance, candidates should practise identifying the strengths and weaknesses of an idea and presenting reasoned judgments to enhance their development and evaluation skills. Candidates are encouraged to cover a wide range of points from the source texts in their responses while ensuring depth through meaningful development and evaluation.

Overall, responses reflected a high level of engagement with the texts and demonstrated comprehension of key ideas. However, limitations in development and evaluation often hindered higher achievement. By focusing on critical thinking, integrating evaluation throughout responses, and improving the balance between breadth and depth, candidates can further improve their performance on the Reading component of the paper.

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Writing

The majority of responses demonstrated a reasonable grasp of simple punctuation, such as full stops and commas, with apostrophes correctly used for contractions and possessives. However, more complex punctuation, including colons and semi-colons, was seldom attempted and often misused. There was some effective use of brackets, dashes, and ellipses, though these were less frequently observed in candidate responses.

Long sentences, often linked by conjunctions, were prevalent, though some responses showed inconsistent paragraphing and a lack of sentence clarity. While stronger responses displayed a variety of sentence structures and organisation, weaker responses tended to rely on the source texts, limiting originality. Many candidates made genuine attempts to use their own words, but in many cases, the structure and order of ideas in candidates' responses frequently mirrored the original texts, showing limited reshaping.

Vocabulary usage ranged from basic to advanced. Many responses employed discourse markers and connective phrases such as 'however,' 'in addition,' and 'moreover,' although these were sometimes used indiscriminately. Some candidates attempted ambitious vocabulary, though this was not always accurately or appropriately used. Examples of impressive vocabulary included words like 'distraction-free environment,' 'critical thinking,' 'perspective,' and 'implement'. Weaker responses often over-relied on the language of the texts, demonstrating limited originality.

Spelling was generally accurate while grammar issues were more pronounced. Common errors included subject-verb agreement inconsistencies (e.g. 'candidate has phones for learning'), tense mismatches, pluralization issues, and awkward sentence constructions. For example, some candidates confused 'loose' with 'lose,' 'specially' with 'especially,' and 'in the passed' with 'in the past.' In addition, confusion of the homophones 'principle' with 'principal' and 'whether,' with 'weather' was prevalent in many responses.

Stronger responses demonstrated effective linking of ideas and coherent argument structures, while weaker responses showed limited control over basic grammatical forms, and sometimes neglected paragraphs entirely, impacting clarity and flow.

To improve the mark achieved for Writing, candidates would benefit from targeted guidance on the proper use of punctuation, particularly colons, semi-colons, and dialogue formatting, the development of a wider range of vocabulary, greater grammatical accuracy, and practice in structuring responses with clear and coherent paragraphs. Close reading of high-quality texts which model natural language use and persuasive writing styles would also be beneficial for candidates.

Section B

General comments

The narrative questions (**Question 4** and **Question 5**) were more popular than the descriptive questions (**Question 2** and **Question 3**). **Question 2** was the least popular choice. Responses to this question often lacked balance and depth, with many focusing extensively on the departure for a trip while neglecting the return. These were often chronological recounts rather than descriptive pieces. Common weaknesses included an over-reliance on general adjectives and adverbs, a lack of sensory imagery, and a tendency to fall into narrative structures. While **Question 3** was slightly more popular than **Question 2**, here candidates often neglected to discuss two role models, instead focusing on just one. Stronger responses provided authentic and meaningful accounts of what these role models represented, while weaker responses were formulaic, consisting of introductory sentences followed by lengthy, repetitive paragraphs that lacked depth. For **Question 3**, heartfelt descriptions of role models were seen, though many lacked the sensory richness expected of a descriptive task. A common weakness was the blending of descriptive and narrative styles was observed, particularly in **Question 2**, where candidates narrated events instead of describing them. Similarly, in **Question 3**, candidates often provided a 'shopping list' of qualities for their role models rather than exploring their significance in depth. When descriptive responses were successful, they created vivid, immersive pieces with carefully chosen details and a focus on atmosphere.

Question 4 and **Question 5** proved popular choices though **Question 5** was the most popular and often produced creative and varied responses. Most candidates skilfully integrated the given sentence into their stories, creating diverse scenarios ranging from humorous and light-hearted situations to adventurous or

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poignant tales. Successful responses avoided clichéd endings, maintaining reader interest with imaginative outcomes. Responses to both **Questions 4** and **5** often displayed thoughtful storylines, character development, and the use of sensory and figurative language. The most successful narratives integrated dialogue effectively, with stronger responses using it to develop characterisation and enhance atmosphere. Popular scenarios included dramatic events such as forgotten passports, surprise parties, and moments of personal failure or triumph. A few candidates crafted non-chronological narratives, starting with a key event and using flashbacks to build suspense. However, this technique was only effective when executed thoughtfully and when it was seamlessly integrated into the narrative.

Many candidates showed reasonable control of grammar and vocabulary, though errors were common. Issues included repetitive use of vocabulary, misuse of homophones, and inconsistencies in tenses and subject-verb agreement. Most candidates demonstrated reasonable essay structure and were able to reach a conclusion. Only a small number of responses showed that the candidate had run out of time, however some showed an imbalance in responses between ***Sections A*** and ***B***, with the latter receiving only minimal attention. This highlights the importance of effective time management during exams, an area where additional guidance and practice could prove beneficial.

Content and Structure

In terms of content, most responses were fairly successful, with the best ones incorporating realistic and engaging features such as tension in emergencies or the frustration caused by group dynamics.

Most responses demonstrated an awareness of literary devices, particularly in narrative writing. The use of direct speech was generally effective, though in a few cases this was over-used, resulting in dialogue-heavy responses that resembled film scripts. Many candidates employed stock phrases, similes, rhetorical questions, and alliteration, often making a conscious effort to include these features. While these devices were frequently present in opening paragraphs, the standard of writing sometimes declined in later sections, suggesting a reliance on pre-prepared responses or difficulties with time management.

Stronger responses included a wide-ranging vocabulary, with words such as *ebullient*, *sagacious*, and *ephemeral* enriching their writing. However, less successful attempts at incorporating advanced vocabulary occasionally disrupted the flow of the text. Candidates should focus on using sophisticated language naturally and in context.

Most candidates adhered to a clear structure, with appropriate paragraphing and logical progression. Chronological narratives were the norm, though non-chronological approaches were occasionally used to good effect, especially when the opening paragraph foreshadowed events later in the narrative. Many candidates signalled their conclusions clearly, with some including a moral or lesson learned. While this approach was often executed well, it sometimes felt forced and detracted from the overall impact of the response. In some responses, introductions or preambles were too long and that delayed the main events of the narrative, while in others overly long paragraphs could have been split for greater clarity. Effective planning before writing would likely improve the quality of these responses.

To improve the mark for Content and Structure of both descriptive and narrative writing, candidates should focus on allocating time for planning their response and reviewing their work to ensure coherence, consistency, and accuracy. Short, well-structured responses are more effective than lengthy, unplanned ones. In descriptive writing, emphasis should be given to sensory and emotional details, avoiding the temptation to lapse into narrative structures. Practice should be provided of how to create atmosphere through vivid imagery, figurative language, and precise word choices in advance of the exam. In narrative writing, candidates should be encouraged to develop coherent plots with well-rounded characters and meaningful resolutions, as well as to avoid overused scenarios and pre-prepared responses that may feel disjointed. The natural integration of advanced vocabulary should be practised, and candidates should be encouraged to ensure that literary devices are used to enhance the overall quality of the piece rather than appearing forced or formulaic.

Style and Accuracy

Most responses could be followed, with few entirely lacking in clarity or meaning. However, persistent issues with grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure often impacted the overall quality of writing.

The most successful responses showed a strong command of language, incorporating literary devices, varied sentence structures, and effective pacing. Ambitious vocabulary and phrases such as ‘sultry,’ ‘ambience,’ and ‘raindrops trickled across the windowpane’ enriched the writing when used appropriately.

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Stronger responses skilfully employed similes, metaphors, and idioms, alongside advanced vocabulary like 'discombobulated' and 'inculcated'. Despite occasional grammatical inaccuracies, many responses included engaging and descriptive language that enhanced the narrative or descriptive elements.

A common issue involved punctuation in dialogue, particularly when using question marks or exclamation marks, where errors such as placing a comma after closing speech marks, or omitting punctuation inside the same, were observed.

One of the most significant areas of grammatical weakness was tense inconsistency. Responses frequently shifted between past and present tenses within sentences, disrupting flow and coherence. For instance, a sentence might begin in the present tense and unexpectedly transition to the past, causing confusion. Addressing this issue would significantly improve the overall clarity and cohesion of many responses. Errors in subject-verb agreement were widespread and these often undermined the impact of otherwise strong vocabulary and ideas. While most responses demonstrated basic punctuation skills, many struggled with sentence separation; run-on sentences and comma splices were common. Additionally, some candidates overused dialogue to the point where responses resembled play scripts, reducing opportunities for descriptive depth. Others failed to format dialogue correctly, neglecting to start a new line for each speaker. Many candidates structured their work well with clear paragraphing. However, some responses lacked proper paragraph breaks, leading to disorganised presentation of ideas. Candidates should be reminded that effective paragraphing is essential for guiding the reader and ensuring coherence. A number of candidates attempted to use pre-learned sophisticated vocabulary and idioms, but these were often deployed awkwardly or out of context. Similarly, some relied heavily on rote-learned stock phrases, which detracted from the natural flow of their writing. Issues were also seen in the confusion of homophones, such as 'there' and 'their.' and there was occasional, though isolated, use of inappropriate language.

To improve their mark for Style and Accuracy, candidates should pay attention to tense consistency and subject-verb agreement; this will aid clarity and coherence. Emphasis should be placed on accurate sentence separation, use of varied punctuation, and correct formatting of dialogue, as this would enhance the overall quality of many responses. While ambitious vocabulary is encouraged, candidates should be encouraged to focus on using it naturally and in context. Candidates are encouraged to allocate time for planning and reviewing their work. They are also advised to use dialogue sparingly and purposefully, integrating it naturally into their narratives rather than letting it dominate the response. By addressing these areas, candidates will be better equipped to produce polished, coherent, and impactful writing.

Question 2

Describe the scene in your home when your family is preparing to go away somewhere together, for example on holiday or on a day trip, **and** when they arrive home

This descriptive writing question which focused on the preparation for and return from a family holiday, was the least popular choice among candidates. While it offered opportunities for creativity and rich sensory description, many responses lacked focus and drifted into narrative.

The most effective responses captured contrasting emotions, such as the excitement and chaos of preparing for the trip versus the anti-climax or relief upon returning home. These responses used sensory imagery and figurative language effectively, such as describing 'the kitchen as a hive of activity, buzzing with chatter and laughter'. Humour and hyperbole were used by some candidates to portray chaotic family dynamics, with vivid depictions of frayed tempers, siblings squabbling over clothes, and parents' contrasting roles during preparation such as 'Mum doing everything while Dad washed the car or read the newspaper'. More successful responses conveyed atmosphere and detail through descriptive techniques, including imagery and list effects, to illustrate the scenes of preparation and return.

However, many candidates struggled to maintain a descriptive approach, instead veering into narrative. A significant number of responses became chronological accounts of the holiday itself, focusing on events at the destination rather than on the preparation and return as required by the question. Several candidates neglected the second part of the task or included it only briefly or as a single sentence. Some responses also failed to address the preparation phase in sufficient detail. Several candidates misinterpreted the question, producing narratives centred on holidays or journeys rather than descriptive depictions of the specified scenes. A number of responses demonstrated a limited range of descriptive features, focusing instead on factual recounting of actions. This lack of sensory detail and imagery reduced the effectiveness of the writing.

To help them improve their mark for ***Section B***, candidates should be encouraged to carefully analyse the question to ensure their responses address all required aspects, such as the preparation **and** return phases.

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Attention should also be given to ensuring that candidates focus on creating vivid imagery and atmosphere rather than recounting events. Candidates are encouraged to consider sensory language, figurative devices, and varied sentence structures to enhance their descriptions. To avoid imbalance, candidates should be reminded to allocate equal attention to both of the required elements of the question, exploring the contrasts in mood and experience between these. Finally, candidates should be encouraged to practice organising their ideas into clear, coherent sections, ensuring that both parts of the question are well-developed.

Question 3

Describe two very different people, apart from your parents, who are important role models for you. They could be relatives, friends or famous people. Say why they are important to you.

This question, which required candidates to describe two role models, was among the least popular choices but allowed for some engaging and reflective responses when chosen. While most responses addressed the question, there were notable differences in quality and approach, with stronger responses demonstrating greater depth and insight.

Many candidates effectively described the emotional and psychological impact of their role models, using vivid imagery and metaphors. Examples included grandparents who provided nurture and wisdom, or friends with contrasting qualities, such as one being a scholar and the other an athlete. Stronger responses explored how the individuals influenced their lives in different ways, often creating heartfelt and moving accounts. Rather than emphasising physical appearance, most responses focused on the character traits, achievements, and impact of their role models. This approach allowed for richer content and deeper engagement with the task. More successful responses highlighted the differences between the two role models effectively, such as contrasting a caring grandmother with a successful celebrity or athlete. Some candidates concluded with thoughtful reflections on the shared qualities of their role models, such as resilience, compassion, or ambition.

Weaker responses often struggled to provide detailed descriptions, resulting in responses that felt plain or overly factual. Some relied on listing achievements or generic attributes without any specific examples or personal connections. While most candidates addressed the differences between their role models, weaker responses chose individuals who were not sufficiently distinct, limiting the scope for meaningful comparison. A few candidates wrote broadly about categories of people, such as teachers or relatives, without focusing on specific individuals. This lack of specificity weakened their responses. Some candidates ran out of ideas after a brief physical description or list of accomplishments, resulting in underdeveloped answers.

To improve, candidates should be encouraged to focus on specific individuals, detailing not only their achievements but also their unique qualities and the personal impact they have had. When describing people, candidates should be encouraged to provide a balance between descriptive detail (physical and psychological) and personal reflection on the influence of these individuals. Where questions require choosing two individuals, candidates should be reminded of the importance of choosing two distinctly different role models to allow for meaningful comparisons. Planning their responses can help candidates improve coherence and depth. More successful responses demonstrated evidence of planning, following a clear structure to describe each role model and then drawing comparisons or conclusions.

Question 4

Write a story in which someone receives an unexpected telephone call with some exciting news.

This narrative question, based on a phone call delivering ‘exciting news,’ was the second most popular choice. Responses showcased a variety of imaginative scenarios, ranging from domestic and relatable moments to fantastical and dramatic events. While common themes included university acceptances, pregnancy announcements, and family reunions, the best narratives developed these ideas in unique and engaging ways. For instance, some explored the aftermath of the news, focusing on its impact on relationships or future choices, rather than merely recounting the announcement itself. More successful responses demonstrated skilful use of tension and pacing, building up to the phone call with cliffhangers and dramatic sentences. This approach effectively engaged the reader and added depth to the story. Sensory descriptions, dialogue, and figurative language were also used to enhance the narrative and create vivid imagery. Emotional responses to the news were often depicted convincingly, drawing the reader into the narrative. Candidates who avoided excessive melodrama and instead portrayed authentic and relatable reactions were particularly successful. Some candidates began the narrative with the phone call, immediately immersing the reader in the action. Others built up to the call, creating suspense and anticipation. Both approaches were effective when executed well.

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In some cases, narratives focused solely on feelings of excitement without exploring the broader implications of the news or providing sufficient context. This lack of narrative progression resulted in responses which were somewhat 'flat'. Weaker responses frequently omitted scene-setting, imagery, and descriptive language, relying instead on straightforward accounts of events. This diminished the overall impact of the story. A few responses featured negative news or omitted the element of excitement altogether, failing to adhere to the requirements of the question.

To help improve their responses to the narrative writing questions, candidates should be encouraged to spend a few minutes planning their answer to help them create a cohesive and well-structured response. This includes developing a clear beginning, middle, and end, and ensuring a logical progression of events. Candidates should also be encouraged to consider the importance of sensory descriptions, imagery, and varied sentence structures to create a more engaging narrative. As more successful narratives often include authentic emotional responses that resonate with the reader, candidates should aim to balance emotion with storytelling, avoiding excessive melodrama.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'What do you mean, you forgot it?'

Question 5, which tasked candidates with embedding the sentence 'What do you mean, you forgot it?' into a narrative, was the most popular question. Its open-ended nature encouraged a diverse range of responses, from common scenarios to highly imaginative narratives. While many candidates demonstrated effective storytelling, others struggled with integration of the sentence and with narrative development. Common scenarios included forgotten tickets, wedding rings, or birthday presents. These relatable themes were frequently well-developed. More unusual and engaging scenarios involved jungle adventures, wartime settings, haunted houses, or even fantastical worlds. Exceptional examples included unique plots, such as a campaign to reinstate a teacher dismissed unfairly, which showcased thoughtful narrative development. Many candidates managed to embed the given sentence meaningfully, using it as a pivotal moment to drive the narrative forward. Effective responses placed the sentence at a key moment of tension, often incorporating it into dynamic dialogue or conflict between characters. More successful responses effectively set the scene with vivid descriptions of, for example, forests, bustling airports, or tense wedding ceremonies. In these narratives, sensory language and dialogue were used to create immersive and emotionally engaging narratives. Better responses also employed narrative techniques such as flashbacks, pacing, and shifts in perspective to maintain reader interest. In more successful responses, dialogue was often well-crafted, showcasing the characters' emotions and relationships.

However, some responses did not integrate the given sentence naturally, resulting in the sentence feeling forced or disconnected. Pre-prepared or formulaic responses were particularly prone to this issue, with the sentence often shoehorned into the story. Over-elaborate plots reminiscent of action films often lacked coherence or focus. Weaker responses frequently covered too long a period of time or included multiple climaxes, leading to rushed or incoherent narratives. In some cases, the forgotten item had little impact on the story, diminishing the tension and significance of the plot. While many responses effectively used the sentence to build tension, some lacked emotional depth or ended on an anticlimactic note. Excessive melodrama or unrealistic character interactions occasionally weakened the overall impact of the response.

To improve, candidates should be encouraged to spend time planning their narratives, ensuring the given sentence is integral to the plot and that the story has a clear structure with a beginning, middle, and end. Practising this type of narrative question would help candidates learn to embed given phrases naturally, making them central to the narrative's progression. Candidates should be reminded that more successful narratives build tension effectively while avoiding abrupt or anticlimactic endings. Focus should also be given to learning the skills required to create a satisfying resolution to a story.

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