

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/01
Reading Passages

Key messages

- candidates should ensure that they read all questions carefully and take careful note of specific instructions, such as ‘using your own words’ or ‘select **one** word’
- candidates should take note of the number of marks available for each question – if there are two marks they should look for two discrete points
- candidates should check their work carefully to avoid unnecessary errors, especially in **Question 2** where there are 15 marks awarded for Writing
- in **Question 1(f)** candidates should only select language choices from the lines of the passage specified in the question
- in **Question 2** candidates should read the question carefully to ensure that they adopt an appropriate style and register
- in **Question 2** candidates should select relevant ideas from Passage B and evaluate them in response to the task set, using the specified format and voice
- in **Question 3(c)** the candidates should use the bullet points to ensure that the response covers all the assessment objectives but may choose to interweave their comments on language, structure and techniques throughout the response

General comments

Examiners noted that the majority of candidates made some attempt to write a relevant response to every question on the paper, although a minority did not attempt all of the tasks. Although most candidates had clearly been apprised of the specific requirements of each task, a few candidates misunderstood what they were required to do. This was usually simply the result of not reading the question carefully enough.

The texts used on this paper proved effective and elicited positive responses from candidates. Although Passage A, *The Open Boat*, was written in the nineteenth century, almost all candidates were able to respond with some understanding to **Questions 1(a) – 1(f)**. Passage B, *Are We Nearly There Yet?*, and Passage C, *The Adventure of Space Exploration*, were drawn from the twenty-first century and twentieth century respectively and proved more accessible for many candidates who appreciated the contrasting ways in which the writers conveyed their views and ideas about the human need for adventure.

Examiners reported seeing some impressive work on this paper, especially in **Question 1(f)** where there was some really perceptive analysis of language, and in **Question 3(c)** where some candidates exhibited mature control of the comparison of the writers’ views and ideas in Passages B and C.

The number of tasks that candidates need to complete in this two-hour and 10-minute examination is demanding. Most candidates, however, used their time effectively so that they could spend more time on the questions which are worth more marks. The length of their responses to some of the lower tariff questions suggest, however, that a minority of candidates may be spending too much time on these questions in **Question 1**. Centres are advised to ensure their candidates have plenty of practice in effective use of time so that candidates spend time on each question commensurate with the marks available.

The majority of candidates seem to have followed the order of the questions on the paper. The low tariff questions in **Section A** are designed to build on one another and provide a solid foundation for the analysis required in **Question 1(f)**, and **Questions 3(a) – 3(b)** are designed to lead in to the evaluation and comparison of Passages B and C in **Question 3(c)**.

Candidates should assist the examiner who is assessing their work by signposting their answers clearly where they have used the additional pages in the answer booklet. They should indicate which of the questions they are continuing by writing the number of the question in the margin.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Question 1 was based on Passage A, an extract from *The Open Boat*. Despite being a nineteenth century fiction passage, most candidates found it accessible and were able to understand and follow the narrative.

Question 1 is broken down into several low tariff questions, **(a) – (e)**, worth between one and four marks up to a total of 15. These questions test a candidate's ability to select relevant details from the text and interpret them, as well as commenting on the writer's use of language in specific lines. **Question 1(f)** is a more extended response to the writer's effects and is again based on specified sections of the text.

(a) Re-read lines [1- 7] 'None of them knew the colour of the sky ... small boat navigation'

(i) Using your own words, describe the condition of the sea at the time. [1 mark]

Most candidates gained the one mark available for this question and were able to explain that the sea was rough or violent. There were very few candidates who lifted from the passage in response to this question.

(ii) Using your own words explain what the phrase, 'a man ought to have a bath tub larger', suggests about the boat. [1 mark]

The majority of candidates gained the 1 mark available for this question by explaining that the boat was small. A few candidates simply said it looked like a bathtub without referring to its size.

(b) Re-read lines 8-14, 'The cook squatted ... to snap'. Using your own words, give two reasons why the situation in the boat seems hopeless. [2 marks]

The majority of candidates gained one mark for explaining that the oar was too fragile, but fewer were able to explain that the boat was filling with water / needed bailing out to get the second mark. A number of candidates were denied the marks in this question for failing to use their own words instead offering lifts such as 'water that swirled in', 'thin little oar' or 'ready to snap'.

(c) Using your own words explain the meaning of the following phrases as they are used in the passage:

(i) 'invariably gazed' (line 10)

This was another high scoring question. Most candidates were able to explain both parts of the phrase correctly as looking continuously. Where a candidate explained part of the phrase they were able to access one mark. Some were able to explain 'gazed' as 'stared' or 'looked' but found 'invariably' harder to explain.

(ii) 'profound dejection' (line 15)

Candidates found this part of the question slightly more challenging. Many were able to offer a meaning for 'dejection' and gain one mark, but some candidates did not address the whole phrase.

(d) Re-read lines 8 – 10, 'The cook squatted ... "a narrow clip."'

What impressions does the writer give of the cook in the way that he describes him at this point? [3 marks]

In this question, candidates could gain up to three marks for relevant explanations of how the cook is presented in these lines. Most candidates were able to explain that the cook is overweight, with some also citing his dishevelled or scruffy appearance. Fewer commented on his more proactive

role in bailing out the water. Some candidates missed the determined nature of the cook, instead mistakenly seeing him as cowardly or afraid.

- (e) **Re-read lines 17–20: ‘this captain had him on the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later the stump of a top-mast that slashed to and fro at the waves, and went low and lower, and down’.**

Using your own words, explain how the writer uses language in the phrases underlined to convey the captain’s feelings about the loss of his ship [4 marks]

The majority of candidates found this question reasonably accessible and were able to explain how the captain’s feelings are mirrored in the descriptions of the ship sinking. Many commented on the use of ‘greys’ to reflect his misery, as well as the gradual sinking in ‘low and lower, and down’ indicating his own sinking feelings. Some were also able to explain that ‘the stump of a top-mast ...’ reflects the pain and suffering experienced by the captain who feels as though his ship is part of him. Many also offered a general overview of the description to explain the captain’s despair.

- (f) **Re-read lines 24 – 35, ‘A seat in this boat ... of the crests’.**

Explain how the writer uses language and techniques to describe:

- the movement of the boat
- the sea

In your answer you should select powerful words and phrases and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

You should write about 200 – 300 words

Up to 15 marks are available for Reading.

15 marks were available for this extended response on the writer’s effects. The specified sections of the text offered candidates a wide range of language choices and techniques to explore. Any choices and comments which focused on the bullet points in the question and offered explanations of their use were rewarded. It was gratifying to see that for the vast majority of candidates this nineteenth century passage proved accessible and interesting with even the weakest responses offering some relevant choices and comments.

The strongest responses made wide-ranging and judicious language choices focusing on the descriptions of the movement of the boat and linking the images together to explore different layers of meaning. Many candidates offered perceptive analysis exploring the use of ‘a bucking bronco’ as emphasising the violence and unpredictability of the sea, as well as the precarious situation of the boat. This was then linked to the extended use of animal imagery to emphasise the wild and dangerous conditions in ‘pranced and reared, and plunged like and animal’ and ‘like a horse making for a fence outrageously high’. The boat was also hailed as plucky and heroic in descriptions such as ‘scornfully bumping a crest’ and almost seeing the waves as a challenge in the phrases such as ‘slide and race and splash’. Candidates also commented perceptively on the second bullet point focusing on the destructive power of the sea. Many candidates commented on language used to emphasise the height of the waves such as ‘walls of water’ but were then able to explain that it not only indicated great height, but also a barrier to stop the boat progressing any further and to ensure it would be battered to pieces if it tried to dive through. The candidates could also see the malicious intent implied in ‘next menace’, ‘they came in silence’ and ‘final outburst’. Some candidates associated ‘grim water’ with ‘grim reaper’ very successfully, and there were some neat interpretations of ‘terrible grace’.

Weaker responses kept giving the same effects for a number of choices rather than spotting the subtle differences or became confused as to whether the sea was moving the boat, or the boat was moving itself in response to the sea. Often ‘mystic’ was attributed to the sea instead of the boat’s ability to survive. A small number of candidates found it difficult to explain the meanings of words, but most were able to offer some creditable comments.

A small but significant number of candidates did not follow the instructions in the question and selected language choices that were not in the specified lines of the passage. Any quotations outside the specified area of the passage could not be credited. Candidates are advised to read the question very carefully.

Question 2

Imagine that you are a member of the Coast Guard who came to the aid of the Maher family on Thursday. You have been informed that the Mahers are considering another attempt to sail to the islands in the next few days.

Write a report for your superior summarising the concerns you have about the family resuming their voyage at this point.

You should write no more than 250 words.

There are up to 15 marks available for the quality of your writing, and up to 10 marks available for the content of your answer.

This question was based on Passage B, *Are We Nearly There Yet?* and offered up to 15 marks for Writing and 10 marks for Reading. For the Reading marks candidates were expected to demonstrate understanding of explicit and implicit meanings and attitudes and critically evaluate the facts, ideas and opinions expressed in Passage B. For the Writing marks candidates were expected to write in an appropriate voice and register, write accurately and use a range of sentence structures and vocabulary for effect.

In terms of reading, candidates clearly found the passage accessible and interesting with many expressing strong views about the irresponsibility of the Maher parents putting their own needs for adventure and excitement before the needs of their young daughters. Many cited the couple's inexperience as sailors, their failure to pack essential provisions to make space for toys, and their general lack of common sense in repeating a voyage which had already turned out disastrously once. Many argued the couple had already wasted the time and resources of the rescue services so should not be allowed to set sail again.

The main problem when addressing the Reading assessment objectives was the failure to identify and evaluate a *range* of ideas. Candidates should be aware that to get into the higher mark bands they are expected to select a number of appropriate ideas from the passage to evaluate. Most candidates chose a few of the more straightforward ideas from the passage, the most popular being the Mahers' lack of experience, the children's illnesses. Mr Maher's bad back and Mrs Maher's sea-sickness. Such responses often lacked a sense of overview or acknowledgement of the less obvious ideas in the passage. The strongest responses offered a much more comprehensive evaluation of the information given in the article, often having to read for implied meanings. They referred to the 'Captain's (b)log' and were able to comment on the sudden changes of mood from 'excitement' to 'rubbish' to 'wonder, contentment, peace to 'this may be the stupidest thing we've ever done' then back to 'good spirits'. Many questioned whether the Mahers were themselves psychologically capable of such a challenge, even without the demands of two young children, citing the rather romantic notions of the voyage and the childish behaviour indicated in their 'fist bumps'.

As a writing task, this proved largely successful, most candidates convincingly adopting an appropriate register and tone for a report to their superior. Examiners reported seeing very few responses in the lower bands for Writing. Most adopted a convincing voice and used formal but persuasive language to express their views. Some responses were too informal and expressed their frustration with the family rather strongly lacking awareness of purpose and audience. Stronger responses were highly accurate using a wide range of suitable vocabulary. Others were less convincing but still maintained a reasonably consistent voice and communicated clearly. Weaker candidates tended to produce repetitive sentence structures, and mistakes of spelling, punctuation and grammar were sometimes evident, occasionally impeding communication. Some candidates wrote a formal letter instead of a report, but still addressed the audience appropriately. A small number of candidates misread the question and wrote directly to the Maher parents. Obviously, the purpose and audience were not fully addressed in these responses.

Question 3

Question 3 was based on both Passage B and Passage C. **Questions 3(a)–3(b)** were low tariff questions on both passages, designed to lead candidates to the extended **Question 3(c)** where they are asked to compare how the writers' views and ideas are conveyed.

- (a) (i) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the phrase 'exotic and remote' (line 17).** [1 mark]

To gain this mark candidates had to explain the meaning of both 'exotic' and 'remote' as used in the passage. The majority of candidates were able to explain 'remote' but few also offered an explanation of 'exotic', often assuming it meant they were tropical islands.

- (ii) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by 'seemed like a distant dream' (line 17).** [1 mark]

Most candidates were able to explain that it now seemed an unrealistic plan or that it was now unlikely that they would get to the islands.

- (b) **Re-read paragraphs 1 and 2 'Distinguished guests ... our collective comprehension.'**

- (i) **What does the phrase, 'Distinguished guests', suggest about President Kennedy's audience?** [1 mark]

The majority of candidates gained the mark on this question by explaining the guests' importance, influence, or power. A few candidates offered wealthy or famous alone, which was not credited.

- (ii) **Give two ways in which President Kennedy uses language to attract the attention of his audience in paragraph 2.**

Many candidates gained the full two marks for this question by offering two clear examples of literary techniques from paragraph 2. Occasionally very vague answers were offered with no clear examples, so couldn't be credited. A large number of candidates did not read the question carefully and offered examples from paragraph 3. These could not be credited.

- (c) **How do the writers of Passage B, Are we nearly there yet?, and Passage C, The Adventure of Space Exploration, convey their views and ideas about the human need for adventure and exploration?**

In your response you should compare and contrast:

- the views and ideas each writer presents to their audience
- the evidence that the writers use to support their ideas and views and how reliable it is
- the language, structure and techniques used by the writers and why they are effective

Remember to support your answer with details from the passages.

You should write about 300 to 350 words.

There are up to 20 marks available for the content of your answer

It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates were able to make a meaningful response to the task. At its heart this task requires candidates to think independently, making judgements about both texts, evaluating the 'power' of the language, structure and techniques the writers have used, and comparing the way they have presented their views and ideas.

Examiners reported seeing some impressive responses to this question where candidates were able to compare both passages at length with comments on language and structure skilfully interwoven with the juxtaposition of ideas and views. Better responses started by comparing the text-types and purposes of the passages, acknowledging that they were offering very different perspectives and had very different purposes. These responses made good use of information given; they recognised that Passage B was more factual and informative, telling the personal story of one family, whereas Passage C was an important speech historically, using many rhetorical

devices to interest and persuade the audience. Many candidates acknowledged the different eras in which the passages were written, citing the ambitious nature of Kennedy's speech, and the heavily veiled mockery of the writer of Passage B, who doesn't offer judgements of the Mahers, but allows the reader to come to their own conclusions through the information given. Most could say something about Passage B's use of personal experiences and direct quotations from the couple, but only the best responses analysed the effects of the romantic language used to describe their 'dreams' which is juxtaposed with the more factual language when describing the rescue and the problems faced by the family. A number of responses did not refer at all to the Captain's (b)log. There was some good analysis of the more figurative language used in Passage C to describe the achievements of mankind, and the way that famous inventors and explorers were quoted in direct speech to make the speech more convincing and persuasive. Candidates need to be aware that analysis of use of language must have short, relevant textual support, and a clear explanation of the effect on the reader: device spotting, use of simile/metaphor, rhetorical questions or statistical evidence, counts at best as 'identification' if purpose and effect are not present.

The weaker responses tended to concentrate on Passage B instead of making time to fully understand Passage C, hence comparisons, if drawn, tended to be superficial. These responses failed to take an overview of the passages and what the writers were saying. Some responses failed to give textual support for the comparison of views, only for use of language that was treated separately; conversely others lifted whole chunks of quotation to make the points for them. The best responses demonstrated the art of embedding neat snippets of quotation within their analysis. Some failed to explore the differences in views, focusing more on describing the content of the passages.

A small number of candidates made little or no use of subject terminology and some of those who did so used a limited range of terminology and were unsure about the difference between a metaphor and a simile. The very best candidates were able to use a wide range of terminology to support their discussion of how the passages worked to convey the writers' views and opinions to influence the reader. However, it is not necessary to import the kind of linguistic analysis more appropriate for A-Level English Language into this discussion as it can lead to an obsession with naming of parts rather than understanding meaning. There was also considerable repetition in weaker responses to this question.

A small minority of candidates ran out of time and didn't attempt **Question 3(c)** or offered a brief, undeveloped response, sometimes only referring to Passage B.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/02
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were fifteen marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- articulate and express what is thought, felt and imagined
- organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- use a range of appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures
- use register appropriate to audience and purpose
- make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
- analyse and critically evaluate facts, ideas and opinions, using appropriate support from the text
- select and synthesise information for specific purposes
- use an appropriate form and style, adapted for the intended audience and genre
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives.

General comments

Most candidates showed a good grasp of what was expected in both the DIRECTED WRITING AND COMPOSITION. Responses were substantial and purposeful, with relatively few brief or undeveloped answers. There was evidence in many scripts of a clear awareness of how marks were awarded in the different questions and writing genres and most followed the rubric.

Most responses showed an understanding of the topic in **Question 1** and made sensible use of the reading passages in their responses. Responses clearly engaged with the question and the reading material; they were able to identify how and why charities might use street collections and poster campaigns to raise money and most were able to defend their own charity. Most responses in the middle mark range tended to select a range of evidence from the passages. Weaker answers drifted away from the material and offered a general response or listed some points simply.

In the COMPOSITION, better responses showed a clear understanding of the features of descriptive or narrative writing and in both genres there was developed and structured writing. Some weaker descriptive writing tended to slide into narrative or in some cases was entirely narrative in character; these responses would have benefitted from a clearer grasp of the features of good descriptive style, such as a focus on detail and a more limited time span.

The best responses in both questions were characterised by the careful selection of precise vocabulary and sentence structures to create specific effects. The reader was often intrigued in the early stages of compositions and the writing was consciously shaped in both genres to engage and sustain the reader's interest. In weaker responses, an appropriate register and effective style was more difficult to achieve. In **Question 1**, for example, the required formal tone was sometimes forgotten. In this question and in the compositions, there was insufficient attention paid to basic punctuation in weaker answers. Capital letters were sometimes used rather indiscriminately, appearing frequently where not required but not used for proper nouns, in speech or at the beginnings of sentences. Semi-colons were much in evidence but only quite rarely used accurately.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Directed Writing

Question 1

You work for a national charity. You want to defend your charity against the criticisms in the passages.

Write an article for a national newspaper.

In your article, you should:

- **consider how and why charities might use street collections and poster campaigns to raise money**
- **evaluate the arguments made in both of the passages and explain how your charity would react to them.**

Give reasons and examples to support what you say.

You should use evidence from the two passages you have read to help you answer this question. Remember to write the letter using your own words.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

[40 marks]

40 marks were available for this question, of which 25 were for the quality of writing and 15 for the understanding and use of the content in the passages.

Most responses adhered to an article writing structure using a clear introduction, followed by main ideas and were able to bring their articles to a logical conclusion. They showed understanding of the requirements of an article intended for a national newspaper, and in better responses both passages' content was scrutinised, synthesised and evaluated purposefully. They also wrote fluently and used vocabulary to good effect and adopted an effective register. Many, however, simply listed reasons in support of charities' existence.

The marks for reading

Good responses followed the bullet points but also synthesised the evidence and adopted the evaluative stance required for marks above Band 3. Better responses identified and explored the subtleties of the passages. For example, traders who complain about charity collections also want money from the public, and not all charities can answer questions about when a project will be finished as, if they are helping in a war zone or earth quake area, needs might be ongoing and change. These responses were able to evaluate arguments from both texts and synthesise them. The best responses considered the arguments in both texts as they affected the situation presented, deriving evidence from the ideas and examples in both passages, including the ideas that street collections are a legal method of raising money, town centres are busy, and poster campaign are successful particularly in areas where foot flow is high. These better responses defended their charity against the criticisms in the passages with clear and persuasive arguments.

The most successful responses assimilated the details of the passage into a whole new piece to offer a convincing overview: aggressive tactics could be misinterpreted because it is uncomfortable to be faced with issues; collectors have to be proactive to get noticed; the use of professional companies in fund raising can be more efficient and cost effective; putting people under pressure to donate is less invasive than cold calling; the need to ask questions about accountability of any chosen charity and a consideration of the sustainability of a charity's work.

This kind of evaluative approach to the material in the passage was required for marks in Band 4 and above. Where responses simply selected evidence from the passages, Examiners could not award marks above Band 3.

Responses in the middle range tended to list a range of evidence in support of using street collections and poster campaigns to raise money such as: money going to a worthy cause; volunteers want to help; the town centre is busy; charities rely on the public and poverty shock tactics work. Other responses at this level tended to focus on one passage only, taking as the focus street collections, or poster campaigns.

Weaker responses didn't seem to understand the need to draw on information from the texts or present any evaluation of the arguments presented. These responses were vague, either writing in defence of charities, or even about the sorts of household objects which could be recycled and donated to charities. The misconception here seemed to be that the texts were merely a prompt to help generate ideas rather than a source to be used. Some weaker responses showed over-dependence on some key phrases in the texts and obvious words and phrases such as 'hassled', 'clear set of guidelines', 'pity advertising' and 'lonesome faces' appeared frequently. References to the Kim Meers, Peter Pinkey and the 'children's rights charity' often seemed forced or not well integrated. Responses at this level sometimes misunderstood the task and wrote to their favourite charity to ask 'three simple questions'.

The marks for writing

25 marks were available for register and audience, choice of vocabulary, the structure of the answer, appropriate use of sentence structures and technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Register and audience

Most, across the mark range, wrote an introductory paragraph making clear the purpose of their article.

The majority of responses adopted an appropriate register in their response and structured their answers according to the requirements of an article. Numerous, however, did not conclude their article appropriately, or even at all. Some responses adopted a plain voice with unambitious vocabulary whereas others appeared far too aggressive which undermined their defence.

Most candidates addressed the general public in their responses and continued to do so throughout, keeping an appropriate and respectful tone of voice. This was achieved using sophisticated vocabulary and the embedding of clauses which were directly addressed to the editor.

Weaker responses became confused who they were addressing; some wrote to a charity or the shop owners.

Structure

Some accomplished responses, awarded high marks for writing, handled the material confidently and presented their arguments as to why they should be allowed to work from home, cogently. The issues addressed were combined into a response which was clearly derived from the ideas in both passages but was not dependent on their structure and sequence. Some stronger responses did not base their structure around the bullet points. At the highest level, an overview of the issues involved was given rather than a list of reasons why charities might use street collections and poster campaigns to raise money. Some fluent responses with effective sentences did not give full attention to sequencing, so ideas within and between paragraphs were not linked as smoothly as they could be. Moreover, there was some tendency, even among stronger responses, to neglect the use of paragraphs. Many middle band responses used discursive markers which provided effective structure. Some responses were structured according to the bullet points, occasionally devoting one long paragraph to each. Weaker responses lacked a clear introduction and conclusion to the article and ideas were presented in a jumbled way, often without paragraphs. Responses given marks below Band 3 were characterised by brief or no introductions and a simple list of evidence from one, or both passages, in sequence.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled was given a writing mark in Band 6. These responses were not only authoritative in style and convincing in their arguments but fluent and virtually free of error. Responses in Band 4 were usually purposeful and clear, though not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary and style as those given higher marks. Responses given marks in Band 3 sometimes showed some clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation errors, and often a simplicity of language and style which precluded Examiners from awarding Band 4 marks. Sentence separation errors also appeared at this level and the frequency of errors became self-penalising, as did insecure grammar and awkward phrasing.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- use material from both passages and offer an overview

- try to develop ideas from the passages concisely, using inferences that are suggested, but without drifting beyond
- be aware of the genre you are using for your answer; think carefully about the right style for a letter or an article and the register appropriate to audience
- use paragraphs to structure responses
- check your writing for basic punctuation errors that will inevitably reduce your mark.

Section 2 – Composition

Write about 350 to 450 words on one of the following questions.

Up to 16 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer, and up to 24 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.

Descriptive Writing

2 Write a description of a place where there is too much, or too little, rain. [40 marks]

OR

3 Write a description of a place underground. [40 marks]

The first question was the more popular of the two options.

The first question provided a great variety of responses across the range. The best responses not only demonstrated linguistic and stylistic skills but used a variety of devices to create atmosphere. Complex atmospheres relating to location and thoughts and feelings experienced were developed. There were some outstanding responses with a wide range of vocabulary and imagery evident.

Most responses chose to write from the perspective of an observer experiencing too much, or too little, rain; the location ranged worldwide from inner city England to a monsoon in India. One successful response was set at a grand outside birthday party where the ‘unrelenting rain’ could have ‘doomed the event to oblivion’ whilst another focused on the ‘searing heat’ of a desert where ‘vultures circled the vast emptiness of the landscape, a catastrophic stretch of despair.’ A few successful responses did not focus on rain, or lack of it, but on the description of a place which was well known for rain and one on the vibrancy of a city in the Gulf which allowed for varieties of focus.

Middle band responses tended to list what could be seen across a landscape or scene in a routine and perfunctory way which didn’t allow for detail, creativity or development.

Weaker responses lacked focus and often gave an account of a holiday destination in an unusual location for example breaking down in the Australian outback. A common issue for some mid and lower band responses was that in an attempt to convey immediacy, they began by employing the present tense but then switched to the past.

The second question also produced responses across the range of marks and encouraged an exploration of thoughts and feelings and close observation of detail. This question was approached in different ways. Most who responded to this task wrote about being in a cave or on the underground. One successful response described the derelict workings of a mine; another was set in an underground bunker where ‘history was written on the walls’. Stronger responses often articulated a sense of loneliness, isolation or abandonment and an acute awareness of surroundings. Higher band responses which were set in the underground gave detailed observations of people and the effect of train travel ‘lurching forward causing a domino like chain of jostling and politely muttered sorries’; some created an effective contrast between below and above ground.

Middle band responses were often very narrow in focus, concentrating on darkness and unidentified dangers. These responses sometimes took a narrative approach including a little descriptive detail.

Weaker responses often offered lengthy narratives, typically about being stuck underground and trying to escape. Some responses which included formulaic use of detail from each of the five senses lead to the details and images being presented in a disjointed way. This approach can weaken the structure and overall picture formed in even the strongest of responses.

Marks for Style and Accuracy were sometimes lower than those for Content and Structure. Better responses chose precise and varied vocabulary and controlled complex sentences with secure punctuation within and between sentences. In weaker responses, tenses were used insecurely, and incomplete or poorly separated sentences adversely affected candidates' marks. There were some examples of strings of incomplete, verbless sentences, and this often limited a response to Band 3.

Some responses wrote descriptively through narrated events and, as a result could access the higher marks, whereas weaker responses used narrative alone.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

- avoid narrative and remember to provide descriptive detail
- try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content
- it is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing
- write sentences with proper verbs: there are no special sentence structures for a description.

OR

Narrative Writing

4 Write a story where one character receives help from another character. [40 marks]

OR

5 Write a story which includes the words, 'This was not what I was expecting.' [40 marks]

The first narrative question was the least popular.

Question 4 produced a wide range of often adventurously written responses. Most chose to focus their plots on a character in need and where there was some sort of moral to the tale.

Often candidates placed their narratives in a school situation involving a new student in need of a friend or bullies who got their just deserts. One successful response involved a doctor providing an 'elixir of life' in exchange for a huge sum.

The most successful responses used subtle twists and turns in the narrative which produced complex and sophisticated writing. Higher band responses explored the benefits and consequences of helping others, used appropriate vocabulary to set the scene, intense character description and well placed dialogue.

Middle Band responses often focused on simple adventures, for example straying into a forest, getting lost and being rescued; these were event driven with only brief development and some had a predictable ending 'And then I fell asleep'.

Lower band responses tended to focus on unrealistic events such as saving someone's life after some fantastical misadventure. At this level, responses were complicated and lapsed into plots which were too unwieldy to convey events convincingly. Lower bands responses used unclear sentence structure, over lengthy dialogue, simple vocabulary and had problems with choosing and staying in the correct tense.

There was quite a range of subjects in response to **Question 5**. Responses took both a literal and a philosophical approach; one successful response was a consideration of how to break free from the chains of being ordinary; another contemplated the meaning of life on a journey with 'Mr Ferryman' and the end point standing on the bridge looking over San Francisco not being what was expected.

Some successful responses incorporated 'expectations' into an established narrative genre such as crime or gothic fiction which allowed them to exploit the features of these narratives by creating suspense and horror.

Higher band responses often introduced a more dramatic scenario which represented a turning point for the narrator, allowing them to create suspense and a sense of climax – such as surviving an avalanche. In contrast, one of the most successful responses was a complex and sophisticated monologue which focused on taking directions on a journey to nowhere – the end 'destination' not being what was expected.

Average and weaker responses were characterised by less effective, more contrived endings or by less control over the chronology. Responses given marks in Band 3 were particularly dominated by events, some of them rather unlikely, while Band 2 marks usually reflected very brief accounts with very little to engage the reader in terms of characters and setting. Some stories became a series of events which did not really cohere, and some scenarios lacked credibility, and, in a few cases, there was little sequencing or clarity overall. Overuse of dialogue was often a characteristic of these weaker narratives.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was lively and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, if persistent, limited even competently told stories to Band 3, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation. Speech was over-used only in weaker responses but there were many responses where the punctuation of direct speech was insecure, even when the story itself was quite well-structured. Basic punctuation errors with capital letters, the spelling of simple words and misused homophones appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes so frequent as to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- remember that stories need more than events to interest the reader
- plan the ending before you begin so that you can shape your story appropriately
- characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader
- originality is important; try to think of unusual approaches to your topic but keep the details credible
- check your writing for errors, especially missing full stops.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (9–1)

Paper 0627/03
Speaking and Listening

General comments

This being the third series of 0627 Component 3, there were encouraging signs that centres are becoming more familiar with its. Most centres undertook the required administrative procedures professionally and effectively. Generally, assessment was near or at the standard required.

The importance of this examination in terms of real life skills cannot be over-emphasised. Students must be able to deliver a coherent and articulate message, and justify and expand that message if they are to be successful once they leave school. Therefore preparation of the right kind is crucial. Centres are encouraged to devote adequate classroom time to this component and focus on the skills that are being assessed. This will give them confidence in their ability to give a talk then explain and justify their ideas.

Key messages

Administration – General Points

It is important that centres carefully read the instructions on the administration of the test. These guidelines may be of help.

- The centre should include the following in the packet sent to Cambridge to be moderated:
 - all the recordings for the candidates entered for the series
 - the Oral Examination Summary Forms for all the candidates entered
 - a copy of the marks that have already been sent to Cambridge.

Each of these items is very important in the process of assessing a centre's performance; if a packet is incomplete a delay in the moderation process is inevitable.

- Centres should generate audio files – ideally transferred to a single CD or USB drive – in a recognised common audio file format such as mp3, wav and wma (but not aup) that can be played by standard computer software.
- Centres should check the recordings at regular intervals during the testing process to ensure their quality. Please also check the CD or USB drive before despatching to Cambridge. Faulty recordings continue to delay the process of moderating a small minority of centres.
- The examiner should introduce each candidate's recording by stating the following: the centre's name and number; the candidate's name and number; the name of the examiner and the date on which the test is being conducted. This is a windowed test so the date on which the recording is made must be included to confirm the test has been carried out within the specified dates.
- A separate introduction is required for each candidate's test. It is not acceptable for one generic introduction covering the whole of the centre's cohort to be included with the sample recordings in the same way it would not be acceptable for a generic coversheet to be provided for every candidate taking a written examination. This is a formal terminal test and the same principles apply.
- Where there are multiple examiners at a centre involved in the testing, internal moderation is required. Where the total marks for a candidate have been altered because of this internal moderation, please indicate on the Summary Form which of the three marks have been changed. It is unhelpful if only the total mark is altered.
- Where candidates have been entered but fail to take the test they should be recorded as 'absent' and not awarded a mark of zero. A mark of zero should only be awarded to a candidate who is present for the test but who does not say anything worth awarding marks for when assessed against the marking grids.

Conduct of the Speaking and Listening Test

When considering candidates' marks, the importance of timings must be appreciated.

- **Part 1** should be a minimum of four minutes and a maximum of five minutes. Please note this does not include the examiner's introduction. Where a **Part 1** response is short, please consider whether the assessment criteria can be adequately met and assess accordingly. It is difficult to see how a response can meet higher level criteria in a performance lasting significantly less than four minutes.
- Equally, a response which is significantly overlong is unlikely to fulfil the criteria for Band 5. It is in the best interests of the candidate that the examiner steps in to halt any **Part 1** talk that exceeds the maximum time allowed. This should not be considered as being in anyway rude to the candidate but as a positive act to prevent the candidate exceeding the time limit. In terms of assessment, if an intervention is deemed necessary, it should be considered whether the candidate has successfully fulfilled the criteria for Band 5 if this level is to be awarded.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in Part 2, it is important that the question and answer session lasts long enough for candidates to clearly demonstrate their strengths in both. In **Part 2** a minimum of four minutes and a maximum of five minutes of discussion is expected. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure these timings are adhered to.
- Candidates can take into the test one cue card containing prompt notes. These notes should not be written in full sentences or be read verbatim. A reliance on written material in **Part 1** is counter-productive and only leads to a lack of natural fluency which affects performance. Please note that each cue card should include the name of the candidate and be retained by the centre for six months after the date on which the results are published.
- Examiners should not interrupt or halt candidates within the time allowed for **Part 1**. Examiners should only interrupt to move the candidates into **Part 2** if they show no signs of reaching a natural conclusion after the maximum time allowed.
- If candidates naturally 'dry-up' during **Part 1**, or show signs of momentary distress (because they have forgotten what they were going to say or lose their flow), the examiner should use prompts without resorting to asking questions.
- The use of pre-prepared responses to known questions in **Part 2** is not permitted. When they plan and prepare their responses, candidates are encouraged to consider what questions they may be asked during **Part 2** but there should be no collusion between the examiner and candidate. Candidates who prepare long and unnatural monologues in response to anticipated questions only penalise themselves. The discussions should evolve and to do this an element of spontaneity must be apparent.
- The test should only be attempted once in any examination series. Once the test has begun it should not be re-started or interrupted.
- It is important that the tests are undertaken within the prescribed test window published by Cambridge for each series. Centres are reminded that as part of the examiner's introduction to every individual test undertaken the full date should be quoted.
- The test may be performed in front of a live audience but this audience must be passive and silent throughout both parts of the test. There should be no interaction between the candidate and the audience in either part of the test.

Accuracy of assessment

Generally, centres had applied the criteria accurately, appropriately and fairly. Internal moderation procedures were usually successful in bringing the centre's marking to an appropriate rank order. Where there were issues the following applies:

- Timings were not adhered to in one or both parts of the test but the marks awarded did not take this into consideration. A very short **Part 1** will most likely not fulfil the criteria for the higher bands. This is equally true if a **Part 2** is very short.
- One prominent cause of inaccuracy was generosity in the awarding of marks in **Part 2** for short responses which were not of sufficient length or challenge to secure the higher bands. Responses need to be consistently detailed in **Part 2**.
- Articulate, confident candidates tended to be over assessed where the content was factual rather than demonstrating more analysis and reflection.
- It is important that the examiners do not over-dominate in **Part 2**. Candidates should be allowed to talk and their contribution should be dominant, particularly for those being awarded marks in the higher bands where detailed responses to questions are expected.

Approaches to Part 1

Moderators reported a wide range of topics being undertaken although the tasks generally took the form of an individual presentation. There were no examples of generic topics this session and it is pleasing to see that centres are giving candidates greater choice in this respect. It is important to consider that this component allows differentiation by task setting so the ability of the individual candidate needs to be taken into consideration when choices are made. To achieve the higher bands, the presentations should move beyond the descriptive to include elements of reflection and analysis.

However, there are still centres which appear to give little guidance to candidates when choosing a topic that the candidate can be both enthusiastic and knowledgeable about. Once again, less successful topics included social media, football, footballers' wages, gaming and body image. Although in many ways, young people are the 'experts' on these kinds of topics, they mostly seem to think they can 'get by' on their general knowledge and don't think more deeply about the subject and/or don't attempt to do something different with them. This results in weaker talks which are usually flat, unengaging and brief. When candidates focused on holiday trips these were less successful often because they had little to say beyond the banal as their cultural experiences had been limited.

Focused talks are more successful in that they allow the candidate to explore and go deep into a topic – for example instead of 'My holiday in Spain' a more successful talk would be 'Why my holiday in Spain has made me more aware of a different culture'. Usually, where a candidate spoke about their experience of another culture (often because they are living in the UK but come from elsewhere) they could compare and contrast cultures and ideas and give a meaningful representation of their former home making for a more reflective and interesting talk.

Most candidates did present talks that didn't rely heavily on notes or scripts. This is to be encouraged. Some candidates tried to memorise their whole talks and while this is allowed, it is not encouraged as it often leads to flat and mechanical presentations. Some degree of spontaneity is usually more effective. A higher band talk is not one that is simply recited word perfect but is one where the candidate engages the audience through the range of language devices included. The most successful candidates often display a passion for their topic so the use of tone comes more naturally. It seems that some candidates are making greater use of visual prompts such as PowerPoint presentations and, so long as they are not merely reading from these, then they can make the talk more interesting and lively but they should not be the main focus.

Topics that worked well include:

- Nudge Theory
- Foot binding
- Terrorists and publicity
- Home Schooling
- Problem of Evil
- Procrastination and Me
- My Apprenticeship in (named) Stables
- How to deal with knife crime in the inner cities
- Nurture versus Nature
- Black Holes
- My Mother, My Heroine

Topics that worked less well:

- My holiday
- Football
- Footballers' wages
- Social media
- Body image
- US gun laws
- Should cannabis be made legal?
- Gangs
- My future plans
- An interview for a university placement

Management of Part 2

In most cases, **Part 2** was well conducted and examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions that enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. Some appropriate evidence of sensitivity by the listener was also noted when the topic was personal and potentially upsetting. (It should be noted that candidates should be dissuaded from choosing topics which could cause an intense emotional reaction under test conditions.)

Supportive examiners ask open questions that encourage the candidates to extend their ideas and reflect on the points made in **Part 1**. Pertinent, focused and challenging questioning works best giving candidates every opportunity to display their skills.

The question and answer format can result in some stilted **Part 2** responses, especially when examiners think of their questions as a tick-list rather than a means to delve deeper or broaden the points made by the candidate in **Part 1**.

Some candidates were hindered through the listener cutting into a response when it may have been more advantageous to allow the candidate to continue. Detailed and developed responses are required if marks in the higher bands are to be awarded for Listening.

It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure each candidate is given a minimum of four minutes for **Part 2**. Some **Part 2** responses were limited because the examiner ran out of relevant questions to push the discussion to the required minimum length, thus disadvantaging the candidates.

Advice to Centres

- This is a formal terminal test: Prepare for this examination as any other – i.e. techniques / research / thought about appropriate topics. Practise methods of presentation and response to questioning in other situations as preparation for this test.
- The test timings are as important as they are in any written examination, so examiners, teachers and candidates should adhere to them.
- Follow the instructions on how to present the recordings and documentation efficiently and concisely.
- Please check both documentation and recordings before sending to Cambridge.
- Encourage candidates to choose topics that they know well through personal experience and are passionate about. Issues and ideas work better than factual topics unless the candidate has an individual flair or interest.
- Ensure that the examiners know the topic titles in plenty of time so that they can think about some of the possible areas for questioning. Examiners should have plenty of questions to ask to push candidates to use the time allowed effectively.
- Examiners should ask questions strategically to encourage and help the candidates to think for themselves and show off what they can do. Examiners should avoid saying too much or interrupting too early, which can affect the candidates developing their own ideas.