

May 2018 subject reports

English A Language and Literature

Overall grade boundaries

Higher level

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-13 | 14-27 | 28-41 | 42-54 | 55-66 | 67-79 | 80-100 |

Standard level

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-11 | 12-25 | 26-38 | 39-53 | 54-66 | 67-81 | 82-100 |

General introduction

This May saw a similar progression in candidate numbers to last year: an increase of nearly 20% at HL and 15% at SL bringing the combined total to over 40,000 candidates. As in the previous year, around 10% of candidates were from schools new to the programme.

While the mean grade and grade distributions at HL were almost identical to those of last year, suggesting that this cohort was of a very similar standard, SL saw a decrease in the mean grade, largely in line with teachers' predictions. This was reflected in a drop in the number of candidates awarded 6s and 7s and an increase in the 3s and 4s. The component grade boundaries decided upon at grade award were the same as those of last May, except for the 4 boundary on P2 at SL that was adjusted to avoid being unnecessarily harsh on candidates achieving a borderline grade 3/4. Some possible reasons for the slight decline in standards observed at SL are addressed in this report.

The exam papers were favourably received by the vast majority of teachers as regards comparison of their difficulty with previous years, their accessibility to students, the interest of their subject matter and the clarity and presentation of questions and texts. There was a particularly close correlation at both levels between the way candidates performed on the examination papers and on the early components.

Detailed comments on the way the candidates performed in the four components follow. First however, several points emerging from the reports of the Principal Examiners at both levels are worth highlighting here:

From the information provided for the early components by candidates about the texts and topics they study, it is apparent in the IA that some centres need to check with the current PLA/PLT more closely before selecting the literary texts to study with their students. The WT cover sheets and the tasks carried out by the candidates indicate that there has been some shift away from issues, central to the programme, about how language is used, how it shapes our perceptions, how it may persuade, enlighten or entertain, etc. In some centres, it seems, the emphasis is being placed instead on recent events in the political sphere at a local or international level and, more generally on global issues such as environmental concerns and on debates about gender roles, etc. While one can well understand how such topics are attractive for both teachers and students to work on, it is very important that the aims of the programme – and of the WT component in particular – should not be lost sight of, putting candidates at a disadvantage when it comes to assessment of their submissions.

It was observed by the Principal Examiners of the four components, particularly at SL, that the language skills of an increasing number of candidates are not as proficient as one would expect of a Language A student. Elementary grammatical errors are made, many candidates lack vocabulary and some are not able to write coherently.

In terms of results, this translates into the fact that, generally speaking, the percentage of candidates awarded a grade 3 and below has been increasing in recent sessions and has indeed increased quite significantly at SL between May 17 and May 18. In the opinion of a number of the teacher/examiners on the senior team, this is not unconnected with the practice in some centres of entering candidates for whom the Language B programme would perhaps have been more suitable.

Internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-4 | 5-9 | 10-13 | 14-17 | 18-20 | 21-24 | 25-30 |

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The marking this session seems to have gone smoothly, with the moderators adapting quickly to the introduction of RM3. Moderators continue to be encouraged by the ability to offer feedback on the school's marking with the goal of aligning all schools to a similar standard. Hopefully teachers will take this feedback to heart and try to adjust their marking accordingly. Most schools uploaded their materials carefully and on time. Those schools who failed to

provide accurate uploads were left to have their samples marked “as is,” following the IB policy introduced in 2018 to no longer ask schools to correct their errors.

A wide variety of works were in evidence this session with poetry from Heaney, Duffy, Plath, Owen and Frost, drama from Shakespeare, Miller, Williams, and Soyinka, and novels from Achebe, Orwell, Fitzgerald, Morrison, and O’Brien to name only a few. Candidates discussing extracts from works whose authors do not appear on the PLA received no higher than a mark of 6 in criterion A. A few moderators again commented that some schools need to choose works better suited to their individual candidatures. Most extracts were properly chosen for their significance and their richness of detail for analysis. Occasionally an inappropriate extract would appear, for example a particularly erotic passage, that did not take into account the individual sensitivities of a candidate. Some schools continue to provide extracts of unequal challenge – one candidate receiving a very short poem and another receiving a very long prose passage.

Candidate performance against each criterion

As the same comments from the moderators appear in session after session as reasons for not being able to award higher marks, numerous points offered on the November 2017 Subject Report are thus relevant and have been integrated into the comments below.

Criterion A: Knowledge and understanding of the text or extract

Moderators once again pointed to this criterion as one where teacher marking tended to be generous. They offered the following reasons for not being able to give fuller marks themselves, as the candidates were:

focusing on the larger work rather than the specific extract

offering general information (sometimes as though having been instructed to do so, for the same points would be made throughout an entire sampling of candidates), usually about themes, critical theories or philosophical ideas that were not particularly relevant to an analysis of the extract

explicating or paraphrasing the lines

offering contextual information about the writer or the time of publication of little relevance to the extract but taking up a sizable chunk of time that could have been used for discussion of it

reading out far too many lines, again taking away valuable time for analysis

offering a broad understanding of what was occurring in the extract but being unable to show understanding of individual lines (this was especially true for Shakespeare.)

failing to explore the majority of the extract

Criterion B: Understanding of the use and effects of literary features

The moderators were in agreement that this criterion was the one most likely to be over marked by teachers, and, in addition, they were particularly concerned that teachers did not make better use of subsequent questioning to enable their candidates to earn more credit in this area. Moderators pointed out that the candidates were:

identifying but not discussing the relevance or effects of literary features

showing little understanding or even consideration of the constraints/benefits of genre

failing to have a sound grasp of imagery, figurative language, connotation, the art of characterization, etc.

using highly technical terms to little effect

discussing their works as though the characters were real rather than literary constructs

seeing themes as controlling the work rather than emanating from it

confusing themes with topics and motifs

Criterion C: Organization

The moderators report seeing continued growth in this area, but feel that further work is needed. The concerns they mentioned were:

failing to establish a focus for the discussion that would give purpose to the structure selected and coherency to the overall commentary

failing to offer a sustained 10-minute discussion with appropriate introduction, situation of the extract and conclusion and that did not waste time on extraneous material or reading out and paraphrasing

failing to establish a structure that enabled a discussion of the entire extract and not just select parts (this was particularly evident in schools where candidates were given predetermined outlines to follow.)

failing to make clear transitions from one point to the next

Criterion D: Language

The moderators found that, this session, marking was also too generous in this criterion. Their concerns regarding the candidates were as follows:

failing to use a proper register for an academic exercise

failing to use the vocabulary suited to a particular genre, such as “stanza” for a poem rather than a “paragraph” or a “play” rather than a “book” or “novel.”

failing to speak fluently with minimal hesitation and restating

failing to use a vocabulary that allowed them to express ideas precisely and effectively.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Some of the moderators have suggested that the use of the terms “text,” “extract,” and “work” in the Subject Guide may be leading to confusion on the part of teachers in regard to what is to be expected in a commentary. The Guide points out on page 59 that “The nature and emphasis of the commentary requires students to undertake a literary analysis of the extract chosen. In all cases, the student should aim to explore significant aspects of the extract, showing knowledge and understanding of the extract and its use and effects of literary features.” Later the extract is referred to as a “text” as when the Guide states that the “text” for commentary should not exceed 40 lines.” And, in the marking criteria, the terms text and extract are used simultaneously. Please note that at times the lines the candidates are being asked to discuss is a complete text, such as a complete poem, but at other times, it is merely an extract from a larger work, but, in any event, please understand that the candidate is **only** to be concerned with the lines in front of him or her and not the larger work. As indicated on page 61 of the Guide: “During the commentary students must focus only on the text. If the text is an extract from a novel, for example, the relationship to the whole text or other works by the writer should be mentioned only when relevant.” Thus, if the extract contains an element of foreshadowing, for example, it is relevant for the candidate to mention how this element is played out later in the work, returning quickly to the analysis at hand and keeping a close focus on how the language in the extract is particularly well-chosen for the purpose it serves.

As a further point of clarification, a commentary is, as stated above, a literary analysis, and, as such, should not be an “explication” of the text. The candidates are being asked to show that they understand *how a writer has shaped meaning in this given set of lines*. It is wise, therefore, to encourage candidates to discuss their extracts from the point of view of the writer, rather than to just leap into the “story” and start discussing characters and their actions. As practice, in class, questions should be shaped around the writer, e.g., “how did Shakespeare show this character was frightened from the nature of the language he gives the character to speak?” “Why did Shakespeare choose to make this comparison?” “Why did Shakespeare alter the rhythm at this point?” This practice will help the candidates to be more comfortable with the analysis that they have to make.

And one final point that may be helpful, would be for teachers to practice asking subsequent questions. This too can be integrated into normal teaching activities, while coaching candidates to look more closely and more deeply at their texts – probing them to find answers for how and why something is the way it is – not providing answers or setting up “leading” questions, but allowing the candidates to think for themselves. The moderators singled out poor handling of subsequent questioning as the single greatest factor than handicaps candidates within a school.

Further comments

The IOC is a formal part of the overall assessment for the Language and Literature course. And though this part of the assessment is in the hands of the teacher, it is necessary that it be

treated with the same formality that IB demonstrates with the written papers. Now that IB is no longer monitoring schools for errors that they make, it is imperative that teachers and coordinators allow themselves the proper time and preparation to be sure this assessment is handled correctly. To that end, please observe the following reminders:

review all pertinent materials in the Subject Guide, the Handbook of Procedures, the Teacher Support Material, previous Subject Reports and IA Feedback

be sure that all teachers involved with IA standardize their marking to the standard set in the TSM

choose texts/extracts carefully to give candidates full opportunity to show their skills at close analysis

write guiding questions that prompt candidates to discuss both the content and the literary features in that particular extract

prepare all materials so that they are professional in nature and follow the rules in the Handbook: lines numbered by fives, titles for poems only, no further references to authors, titles, dates, footnotes, page numbers or any other assists

carry out the IOC with honesty and integrity

check and double check that all materials are uploaded correctly – that extracts match the oral being given, that the guiding questions have been included on the extract and that the recording is audible from beginning to end.

Higher level Written Tasks

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-5 | 6-11 | 12-18 | 19-23 | 24-28 | 29-33 | 34-40 |

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The very wide range of material submitted for both tasks is testimony to the creativity and ingenuity of both teachers and candidates. As in previous sessions, there was a wide variety of responses in different text types, and a wider preference in the options for the Task 2 questions.

An increasing number of candidates chose a video text to analyse, benefitting from the study of how language and images are used in mass communication. Some of these texts indicated awareness of the currently evolving genre of promotion and advertising. Other candidates used historical material from advertising or media as stimulus material.

While a number of literary texts are popular and reoccur each session, overall there is a wide and adventurous range of mostly 20th century and contemporary texts in use in Parts 3 and 4, with the addition of earlier classics including Shakespeare, usually Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello or The Merchant of Venice.

For Task 1, newspaper opinion columns and articles were popular choices, though website constructions were less in evidence.

Formal letters, often of complaint, made quite frequent appearances, as well as blog posts, additional chapters or acts of a play, diaries, and pastiches of political speeches. Candidates also attempted Twitter correspondence, texting sequences, screenplays, news reports, interviews, brochures, and travel writing.

Media texts should be closely linked to specific publications in most cases, as this determines register, format, audience expectations and style. This was not always in evidence. Visual elements of media texts were neglected in some cases, thus weakening the overall presentation and reliability of the task.

Gender stereotyping in advertising has been a persistent focus, so it may be harder to use this stimulus to produce work that is not predictable and thus lacking in freshness.

Overall, the essays provided for Task 2 frequently showed confidence, coherence and development. However, examiners detected the overuse of secondary sources in some cases. It is important for candidates to develop independence and creativity, so that they do not need to rely on ready-made judgements from online sources.

When using texts from Part 1 or Part 2, the task may be harder to develop if the text is slighter than the usually rich and complex range in literary texts. This is not to deter candidates from attempting questions that interest them, but to make sure the preliminary investigations into how the text will be analysed can be fulfilled in a realistic and extended way against the criteria of evaluation.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Rationale and Outline

A very clear and helpful Rationale is achieved by candidates when they describe how the task is related to the linguistic or literary aspects of the course studied, and when the text type and its conventions are explained, together with the persona of the author if it is a media text, and the audience that is being addressed. While the majority of Rationales are now more securely written, some candidates fell short of the standard here.

There is an art to producing a clear, relatively brief, and informative Outline, that covers all aspects of the Task, and indicates how it will be developed. Some Outlines are still being produced as detailed paragraph plans, are overlong, and sometimes not as clear as could be wished. Other Outlines are too brief, and do not address all aspects of the prescribed questions clearly enough. It is important to get the balance right here.

Task 1

Criterion B: Task and Content

Those candidates who understood conventions, who matched content to the type of text being produced, and who had researched the topic fully were best placed to score highly on Criterion B.

A persistent observation by examiners, is that while the content of a task 1 piece may be adequate in terms of its genre, it may not relate to language issues as studied in the course. Another concern is that candidates produce thinly veiled essays and fit these into a text-type.

Diaries are not always very successful, especially if they offer no new insight into the point of view of a character and consist mainly of plot summary.

Criterion C: Organization

Coherence was usually handled well by candidates, except where they were not aware fully of conventions of a text type. Media texts should, for example, be written with the style rules of a publication and awareness of a particular audience, to score highly here.

Criterion D: Language and Style

The range of marks was usually 3-5, unless, rarely, the candidate was coming from a second language background and clearly struggling with use of English. Both in Task 1 and Task 2, examiners noted that the tasks could have been improved with proper proofreading to eliminate obvious errors and slips.

Task 2

Criterion B: Response to the Question

It is necessary to have as clear as possible an understanding of what is being examined and investigated in relation to the text that is chosen, and to provide good textual reference, support, and quotation. Depending on the degree of understanding and how the evidence was marshalled, candidates achieved marks here as adequate, good or thorough in performance.

Examiners wished to see more direct reference and quotation in evidence.

In Task 2, the Power and Privilege questions retained popularity. With the question *How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?* there is still a tendency to neglect the 'why' of the question.

There was a growth in the number of candidates attempting questions from Reader, Culture and Text, especially *How could the text be read and interpreted differently by two different readers?* This question was addressed with some degree of success, but some candidates chose readers who did not have sufficiently differentiated viewpoints, or readers who were in some way unrealistically chosen, limiting development.

The companion question in this category, *If the text had been written in a different time or place or language or for a different audience, how and why might it differ?* could produce some problematic responses, sometimes due to the unnecessary attempt to cover time, place, language and audience together, and sometimes due to interpreting the question in such a way that the original text could have become unrecognizable if altered to accommodate a new context.

In Text and Genre, though fewer candidates may have attempted *How does the text conform to or deviate from the conventions of a particular genre, and for what purpose?*, they generally matched this question with plausible answers. The companion question *How has the text borrowed from other texts, and with what effects?* may have been more popular here, and usually candidates who attempted this had researched the question carefully.

Criterion C: Organization

Examiners commented that essays were generally clearly structured and developed, indicating a mostly confident use of the more academic style of writing. The weaker essays lacked a clearly developed argument, were repetitive, or lacked paragraph control and effective transitions.

Criterion D: Language and Style

Usually a correct formal register for the essay was in evidence and supported the clarity and communication of the argument, with most candidates achieving at least a 3 here.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

While encouraging freedom, initiative and creativity, candidates should also be advised at the planning stage in order to avoid committing time to an idea that is either unclear, unsatisfactory, or does not match the course studied, or is not appropriate in some way as a project. Examiners noted that tasks that were not very promising or fruitful had been attempted by candidates, and that this limited the outcome.

While the Guide is clear on the limited help that is to be given to candidates *after* the production of the first draft of the task, it is necessary for teachers to make sure that the task envisaged and planned will work in terms of the course requirements and criteria of assessment.

Teachers should make it abundantly clear from the start of the course that it is important that both Parts 1 and 2, and then Parts 3 and 4, must each be the source of a different task, to maintain the balance from Language and Literature sources across both Written Tasks.

While a very wide variety of possible literary texts is available from the published lists of authors in translation and the main list of texts, it is important to judge which texts are most suitable for each class from year to year, if a choice is available. One important consideration for the teacher to think about prior to choosing any particular literary text, is how well it lends itself to exploitation along the lines of the prescribed questions, or as stimulus for a Task 1 piece.

It is worth mentioning that all tasks should include a bibliography for transparency.

Further comments

Recent events in the political sphere, environmental concerns, the continuing debates about gender roles, and other controversies have taken the attention of teachers and candidates. We must recall that this syllabus is not a study of politics or sociology or current events, but is a Language and Literature course, so that the central issues of how language is used, how it shapes our perceptions, how it may persuade, entertain or enlighten, should be kept to the forefront.

Standard level Written Task

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-2 | 3-5 | 6-9 | 10-12 | 13-14 | 15-17 | 18-20 |

The range and suitability of the work submitted

In general, the range of work was good. Text types submitted included: newspaper story, newspaper editorial, newspaper opinion column, diary, letter, additional scene, additional chapter, poem, police report, psychologist or doctor report, and in increasing numbers, a blog.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Rationale. This session there were a number of very disappointing rationales submitted and many candidates were scoring only half marks or in some cases no marks at all for this criterion, which should, on the face of it, be a very straightforward element of the task.

Many candidates this session submitted a series of bullet points, or sometimes began their rationale with a series of bullet points which were then expanded below. This often meant that the total rationale exceeded the word count. Some rationales were divided into a series of headings.

Often candidates simply summarised the content of their own task. Many failed to mention the section of the course to which their task was linked – particularly those responding to literature. Some candidates stated two or even more text types. Some mentioned that the task was linked to two or sometimes three sections of the taught course. A small number stated the task was linked to a topic or a literary text not declared on the accompanying form.

Criterion B

Most candidates submitted tasks which were relevant and appropriate.

In general, the following observations can be made. A newspaper story often leads to a summary of content, whereas an editorial allows for some critical engagement with the events. Police reports tend to only allow summary of events and candidates are not able to access the higher end of the mark range because there is little critical engagement with the text. Some diary entries also tended to simply summarise content, although at the top end of the mark range candidates were able to use the diary to reflect on the events, postulate alternative choices of action or consider lessons learned by the character.

Blogs also sometimes proved difficult. At the bottom end, they tended to be either close to an essay, or failing to engage critically with material drawing on the taught course. At the upper range of marks students submitted responses which had been formatted with convincing layouts, demonstrated a clear engagement with some aspect of the taught course, and often included comments with contrasting views in the response section at the end of the task, allowing students to demonstrate critical engagement.

The weakest text type tended to be poems. Candidates submitting poems often failed to link them clearly to the taught course, lacked an understanding of the complexity of poetic form and language and frequently tended to focus on a rhyme pattern at the expense of meaning. Pastiche, short story or additional scenes also tended to produce weak responses, with candidates struggling to demonstrate understanding of the characters and themes of the text to which the task related. Short stories often failed to show any clear link to the taught course at all. Having said that, there were a few candidates who were able to demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of poetic language, or genuine engagement with the stylistic features of their chosen text, but these were few and far between.

As in previous sessions, a number of candidates submitted written tasks which had no clear link to Part 1 or Part 2 of the taught course. The content of the task was often political, historical or a topic taken from current affairs, but with no clear language element.

Some students are still submitting essays, which is not an acceptable text type for the Written Task at Standard Level.

Criterion C

Most written tasks are well structured and organised. A few candidates fail to develop the task effectively but in general this criterion is not problematic.

Criterion D

Again, most candidates write effectively. Most demonstrate an appropriate range of vocabulary and a good control of punctuation.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Criterion A

Give students a check list of the requirements of the rationale.

Ensure the rationale is written as a developed paragraph/s in full sentences, not a series of ungrammatical bullet points.

Remind candidates of the need to remain within the word count.

The rationale should precede the task – not be placed after it.

Criterion B

Ensure that the content has a clear language focus when linked to Part 1 or 2.

In the case of a task responding to Part 1 or 2, the task has to have a clear and obvious reason to be written in English. For example a Part 1 study of speeches under the topic Language and Power, leading to a Written Task of a speech by a president located in many parts of Asia or South America, speaking to voters in his/her own country has no obvious reason to be addressed to an audience in English.

As a second example, after studying Advertising in Part 2, a candidate engages with a published advertisement by producing a written task of a letter complaining about the content, language or theme. Here the original advertisement should be in English to enable the candidate to engage with the language as well as the image in the text and the letter should have a clear reason to be addressed to the recipient in English.

In the case of a response to a literary work in translation, it is obviously legitimate to assume the characters could exchange letters or write a diary in English as the text has been studied in English.

When responding to literature, ensure that the candidate is able to demonstrate understanding and critical engagement with the text. A simple narrative summary is unlikely to allow a candidate to achieve the upper mark range.

The written task should be confined to a single text type and relate clearly to one aspect of the taught course. Candidates who try to respond to more than one part of the course at once, or attempt two or more text types in a single task inevitably fail to develop a sustained response to any of them, given the limitations imposed by the word count.

A few candidates are still exceeding the word count – sometimes significantly so, and therefore attract a penalty in Criterion C. Tasks which are below the minimum word count tend to be self-penalising as they fail to develop sufficient depth and detail. Candidates should therefore be reminded that the course requirement is a task of 800-1000 words.

Criterion C

Remind students of the advisability of developing ideas fully and utilising an appropriate and varied range of connectives.

Criterion D

Students should be reminded of the need to proofread their writing carefully to avoid careless mistakes. They should also be reminded of the fallibility of the spell checker which needs to be used in conjunction with careful thought – for example, some candidates had accepted changes to the names of characters leading to some unfortunate errors at times.

Some candidates, particularly those submitting blogs, are increasingly utilising a large number of profanities. Gratuitous bad language is not acceptable, and ultimately candidates should remember that the final audience is an external examiner and submitting coursework with a string of profanities is unlikely to score highly and could be considered offensive.

Further comments

Many candidates are still submitting work with their name, the school name, teacher name and candidate number. A considerable number of forms were submitted from previous exam sessions, sometimes dating back many years. Please ensure that current forms are downloaded each exam session.

Some centres are declaring texts which have been removed from the PLA/PLT in sections where they were not free choice texts.

On the positive side, many candidates are effectively referencing their tasks and an increasing number are including copies of the texts to which the task refers, such as advertisements or poems beneath their written task. Examiners appreciate this.

Higher level paper one

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-2 | 3-4 | 5-7 | 8-10 | 11-13 | 14-16 | 17-20 |

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Relatively few candidates were able to write effectively about the subtleties of the texts, and the longer texts often produced superficial readings. There was a tendency to summarise rather than analyse and a lack of supporting evidence and reference to the text.

Many had difficulty specifying audience, tending to make generalisations such as “everyone who likes science”, “all of the UK”.

Context was an area of difficulty for some candidates, sometimes it was not even mentioned. Lack of historical and geographical knowledge led to vague and often inaccurate assumptions.

Links between formal and stylistic features and context, audience and purpose were lacking; whilst the identification of these features is generally well handled, the analysis of them is not.

Effective introductions and conclusions continue to be a challenge. They were frequently formulaic and often unhelpful. Introductions rarely established a thesis and conclusions did not synthesise. Many introductions described the texts and repeated the information given in titles and footnotes; conclusions tended to repeat points made earlier.

Candidates did not always get to grips with the meaning of the texts, often itemising the components as if they were the meaning themselves rather than the route to the meaning.

Some candidates’ writing suffered from pedestrian expression and a lack of fluency, and a significant number experienced real difficulty with the English language. There were errors of all types, particularly with punctuation, inserting quotations, noun-verb agreement and spelling of subject-specific terminology.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

The rubric and expectations of the examination were, generally, well understood. Introductions demonstrated this and also the candidates’ ability to recognise text types. Register and style were almost always appropriate.

Candidates mostly organised their responses effectively and balanced their treatment of the two chosen texts. More effective planning seems to have resulted in candidates staying on-task; this has been a noticeable feature of this session’s scripts. There was evidence of effective time planning with relatively few unfinished scripts. The linear response was seen less frequently, and candidates seemed better able to compare throughout than in previous examinations.

Candidates are comfortable with digital texts, even if they are not always able to identify them precisely, and tend to choose these over other text types.

An encouraging range of subject-specific terminology was used, mostly accurately and appropriately, although there is still a tendency to use ethos, pathos and logos as blanket terms which need no further explanation. Stylistic features were correctly identified, and the stronger candidates were able to analyse their effects.

Candidates seemed well-prepared in identifying visual elements of texts and some commented more effectively on these than on linguistic aspects. They were able to discuss formal elements of the different text types.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

The second pair of texts, C and D, was chosen by approximately two thirds of candidates, with little difference in how well the texts were understood in comparison with Texts A and B.

Candidates are potentially put off by the length of texts and assume that brevity equates to accessibility, as is clearly the case with Text D, and choices seem to be made on this basis. Similarly, they quite frequently comment negatively on text-heavy extracts and positively on those with graphics. D was the best understood text, C perhaps the least; as they were a pair, this led to some uneven responses.

Text A was largely understood, often superficially, while responses to B were variable. Purpose and audience were mostly recognised, though without much elaboration; the audience for A was described by some simply as “the readers of Science News” and for B, “children”. The similarities and differences between these texts were less well observed than those between C and D, with some candidates searching for more comparisons than actually existed. An example of this was the assumption that Text B was written as a warning against the integration of robots into society. The graphics in the two texts were not generally well compared, though they were understood separately. The “Michelangelo” graphic in A was explained in detail but the second set of pictures was often ignored, while the illustrations in B were frequently described as cartoons. The context of Text A, being contemporary, was very well understood. There were many errors relating to the provenance of Text B and the state of technology in 1913; context here was not well explored, sometimes not mentioned, despite the time gap of over a hundred years between the two texts. Some candidates did not understand the word “clockwork”. Some candidates commented perceptively on the differences in language use in the two texts. The general tendency to summarise or paraphrase narrative texts was evident in the responses to B, and to some extent C; discussion of structure in both texts often began with analysis and ended in summary.

The C/D choice was possibly more popular because of the vividness of Text D and the apparent straightforwardness of C, although this sometimes resulted in a simplistic analysis. D was discussed with enthusiasm and engagement but frequently judged to be the better, more successful text because of its graphics while C was accounted a failure because of its lack of them. Language and formal and stylistic features were very well understood in Text D, with good examples chosen as illustration; there was a tendency to dismiss text C as not having many stylistic features. Many candidates assumed that C and D had a similar purpose, some a similar audience; they also tended to summarise C, particularly its narrative elements, without comment on the relationship between the story of John Miller and the purpose of the extract. A number of candidates identified D as an advertisement and saw it as selling something and C as a call to action, assuming also that both texts offered a solution. Many recognised the allusion in the title of C but few mentioned the pun in D.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Planning needs some consideration. Whilst candidates are clearly being well prepared with plans which cover the essential elements of the task, the more able are being hindered by the formulaic, tick-list response, in that it does not allow for weighting appropriate to the specific text. However, weaker candidates seem to benefit from a framework which enables them to cover the ground.

Candidates need to consider audience more carefully, avoiding the generalised “the audience of this text is every adult”. They must not assume that all readers will have the same view of a text, nor forget that they are analysing the effect on the target audience of the text, not on themselves.

When exploring a “wide range of text types” with students, it is important that these range across time; candidates need to be more familiar with nineteenth and twentieth century texts and their conventions. They should be encouraged to consider the context of older texts carefully.

More emphasis should be placed on comment and analysis, particularly regarding formal and stylistic features. Increasingly, candidates are able to recognize these, but many are not analysing their effects. It is not sufficient to say that a feature “grabs the audience’s attention”; this is not analysis. The difference between summary, paraphrase and analysis needs to be emphasised.

Introductions and conclusions need to be helpful in establishing a thesis and in synthesizing the points made.

Candidates should be encouraged to proofread. Many scripts contained errors, particularly in paragraphing, agreement and basic punctuation and spelling.

It is important that candidates understand that footnotes and glossaries are not provided by the author of the text but by the paper setter.

Candidates should be reminded that the degree of similarity between text pairs will vary and they should not expect to find equal numbers of differences and similarities in the texts.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-2 | 3-4 | 5-6 | 7-9 | 10-13 | 14-16 | 17-20 |

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Criterion A

For both texts, candidates appeared to have difficulty understanding the purpose of the text, the context and text type conventions and how these worked together. The use of textual references for support and the successful embedding of quotes varied greatly amongst candidates. Quite a few responses showed good understanding and analysis of points, but did not give good coverage of the text as a whole. In both texts, many candidates did not consider multiple audiences and purposes, preventing many responses from going beyond 'adequate'.

Text One

The main issue was misreading the text and not interpreting the sarcasm or nuances, resulting in many candidates discussing the purpose of the text as warning people about sharks. A large number of candidates struggled to understand the connection to shark week and the context of the text, as well as its message. Only a small number of candidates understood the finer aspects of the tone of the text (like the irony and humour).

The text type itself was poorly addressed with few candidates using the 'editorial' of the guiding questions as a springboard for analysis while the context of the text was often omitted and few candidates had an overview of the argument and counterargument dealt with in the editorial. There was much assertion and restating of content in a linear fashion and much omission of detail or textual reference as support for comments made. Restating tended to limit marks to 2: "some" understanding.

Text Two

There was a lack of understanding of the broader contextual issues associated with the text, both in terms of text specific content but also of text type conventions and how they can affect the choices made by the author. As in text one, most candidates did not deal effectively with the text type (identified in the guiding questions as a "guide"), many referring to it merely as a travel website or as a blog.

Few candidates dealt with overall context, variety of audience and structure. Many candidates did not mention underground/caves at all and simply wrote about Tasmania as a tourist destination. Some candidates omitted the end of the tour, the materials provided to visitors and the picnic.

Criterion B

As ever, the majority of candidates were able to spot a range of stylistic features but what held many back was the inability to analyse the effects of the devices in depth. This particularly remains the case with examples of figurative language, where often examples are highlighted but not analysed. Many candidates simply explained the passage and pointed out symbols, metaphors, alliteration, etc., without explaining their effect or discussing why the author chose that technique to create an effect.

Candidates who only identified features tended to take a descriptive approach or simple explanation approach rather than a focused, detailed analysis of the features used and their effects. Underdeveloped and weak analysis was a much larger problem than mere summary and paraphrasing. Many candidates seemed unable to deconstruct language and discuss the effects of authorial choices on the reader. It appears that a majority of the candidates were made aware of the importance of the stylistic elements, but the understanding of these features is something that is of a very varied level.

Surprisingly, candidates did struggle with reading, and interpreting visual texts was an issue; certainly, many candidates did not interpret the visual / verbal connections.

For text one, the failure to recognise irony was a major issue for some candidates and this tended to impact the whole response as candidates tried to make their explanation of choices "fit" their reading of the text. The failure to recognise the irony in the text led to misidentification of purpose and misreading of effects.

With text two, some candidates described the photographs literally or generally, writing about their position rather than their purposes within the text.

Criterion

C

Unfortunately, it has been mentioned for the last few sessions but still candidates struggle to write a strong introduction that leads the reader through their argument. There is a lack of focus on developing and keeping a strong analytical thread that links stylistic features to effect and thence to audience and purpose. Construction of a cohesive and persuasive argument within the response also presented challenges. Some candidates randomly assign connectives such as "moreover, consequently, furthermore" at the beginning of sentences/paragraphs without having clear logical links between the ideas presented.

In a sense, responses are quite formulaic. The most common outline consisted of: short intro, expansion of audience/purpose, structure/layout, tone, language paragraph(s), conclusion. A plan for analysis would also be helpful as a number of candidates simply worked their way through the passage with no intentional structure.

Some paraphrase and descriptive summary were evident and weaker candidates relied on this and merely used evidence to complete a sentence.

Criterion D

Although language was generally appropriate candidates do need to be reminded of the need to use punctuation. Common errors are: the use of possessive apostrophes, lack of apostrophe and comma splicing. For many candidates the language was understood but several errors were noted relating to spelling, sentence construction, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure etc.

Candidates could be encouraged to proofread their work before submission as often the errors are slips in spelling and omissions of words in sentences. Much omission of the definite and indefinite article was evident leading to a stilted, fragmented style.

Unfortunately, the use of academic register seemed not to be a requirement by some schools, which put the candidates at a disadvantage.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Criterion A

Most candidates understood the expectations of the task and appeared to know what was required of them. Some candidates identified purpose and target audience clearly at the outset, which helped establish understanding in the introduction. Most attempted to provide a range of specific textual evidence, in order to support their argument.

Text One

Differentiation was clearly evident here as criterion A marks ranged from "little" to "very good".

The best candidates took care to support their statements with textual evidence and understood the manifold purposes of the text.

In the lower ranges there was some description and generalisation that could have applied to any text.

Text Two

Candidates generally responded quite well to this text.

Many candidates commented on the multimodal aspect, but few were able to explain the purpose/effects of these.

The better responses used the "assumption about readers" guiding question successfully as the basis for an argument which drove the whole response.

Some candidates were able to comment insightfully on the intended audience.

Criterion B

In general, the awareness of stylistic features when faced with an unseen text was good, even if the analysis lacked depth. Candidates could identify techniques.

Criterion C

Most candidates were aware of the need to structure and organize the commentary effectively and there were only occasional responses that lacked a structure of some kind. Many candidates still favour a linear approach, which is adequate, but seldom moves the candidate beyond the adequate mark. Candidates often fared better, with regard to structure and organisation, when following the guiding questions as these prompts structured an argument and therefore the cohesion of the response. Some very good responses used stylistic features as the basis for argument thereby driving the whole response.

There was much description and paraphrase evident here but the best responses sustained an argument about the purpose and effect of the whole text in relation to its context, resulting in a well-developed argument.

Criterion D

The language of most candidates was generally of a good standard. Expression was generally clear and most candidates took care to assume an appropriate register and style for commentary writing.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

The May 2018 Language and Literature Paper 1, Standard Level offered colourful, interesting and accessible texts which gave candidates a choice and range of possibilities for commentary with regard to target audience, mode, form, context, purpose and structure. The two texts may have appeared similar but they were very different in text type (an editorial and a promotional guide), purpose and context. These differences gave candidates the option of selecting the text that suited their engagement.

Text 1 served well to distinguish between candidates' ability levels, proving to be accessible and popular while also challenging some in terms of language and tone. Text 2 seemed to be more straightforward but some candidates lacked an ability to deconstruct it at length.

For both texts, many candidates did not focus closely enough on the variety of audiences the text was aiming to persuade.

Text One

Many candidates misread the editorial. There was a clear divide between those who understood the purpose of the editorial and those who misread it. Often candidates would adequately develop an argument and support it with textual evidence, although the argument was wrong.

Many candidates did not notice the tone shift toward the end of the piece which resulted in some fundamental misunderstandings.

The better answers here picked up on the tonal shifts, sarcasm and the historical perspective, used the layout and images effectively to bolster analysis, and explored the layers of audience well.

The weaker answers tended to cling to the facts and figures, offered a thin reading of the image and a very literal interpretation of audience.

There were a number of candidates who missed the ironic tone and therefore could not achieve above a 1 for Criterion A. While some of these same candidates who were also quite weak in the other criteria, there were others who clearly knew the expectations of this task and would have otherwise achieved a high score had they picked up on the irony.

Most candidates understood the implications of layout, use of imagery, images, tone, purpose and language choices.

Understanding the second person address with the present tense in creating a simulated experience allowed stronger candidates to show their ability, but was difficult for some to explain.

Some candidates addressed this text as a conventional advertisement.

Text Two

Appeared a little clearer to the candidates, but many often neglected to refer to the text type in their analysis.

Most candidates were able, to a greater or lesser extent, recognise that the text was a form of advertising and were able to discuss how the author used a range of features to persuade her readers.

Many candidates did point out the visual elements, but the overall context of the text type and its conventions were often not discussed.

Some candidates were able to discuss the ways in which the text made use of advertising techniques, while others only explained a simple purpose and effects.

Many candidates effectively used the rich array of potential avenues for analysis, and the better ones used the guiding questions effectively to look at the “interplay” and the “target audience”.

The weaker responses were thin on interplay and audience and were too assertive in their use of evidence – sometimes it seemed very obvious what the text was doing but they still needed to analyse the effects.

In general, answers tended to concentrate on evidence from the beginning of the text rather than looking for details elsewhere – the cave tour, the experience, etc. Very few responses commented on the separation of the text into the introduction and then specifics about Mole Creek.

Many candidates did not detect the commercial/financial implications of the Cave text.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The candidates must be taught how to write analytically; this is what Paper 1 in Language and Literature is about. Candidates are asked to make observations about and analyze both visual and written texts.

Criterion A

More focus on the relevance of text type and its conventions; stylistic devices (not just a list of elements but actual effects are needed, in connection to purpose, meaning, etc.).

Candidates need to spend time considering the nature of the text types. For example, an editorial or opinion piece is often deliberately provocative and this affects the choices their authors make when attempting to persuade their readers.

When practising the skills associated with Paper 1, candidates must consider contextual issues in greater depth. A candidate's knowledge and understanding of context is often what makes him or her stand out from other candidates.

Candidates need to know how to embed quotes effectively in an essay and how to use quotes and textual references to support analysis. Quotes do not speak for themselves and need explanation in analysis.

Target audience and purpose should be clearly identified and be given consideration during analysis in relation to the effect and the significance of the text's features.

Criterion B

Review how to build a focused and developed analysis of key features, and the difference between a good analysis and simple explanation.

Candidates should know how to analyse sentence types, grammar, punctuation, etc., as these are useful strategies to have and can help them deconstruct language.

Only comment on features specific to online texts if they have clear relevance to the text itself and avoid too much comment on things like tabs and links which detract from important textual analysis.

Criterion C

The importance of a strong introductory paragraph should be reviewed, as well as the elements that would lend strength to a Paper 1 opening: introducing text with text-type, any relevant context, text's purpose, identifying the target audience, and providing some direction or structure for the ensuing analysis.

Development of argument is something that should be looked at. While most commentaries were organised, used paragraphs, had an introduction and a conclusion, there was often a lack of development with paragraphs not being well connected and a lack of argument.

Some schools seem to still be pushing the "Big 5" organisation structure but it is too rigid and too often wastes time on a very poor paragraph structure.

Criterion

D

Exposure to more sophisticated vocabulary is needed for candidates to raise their level of writing.

Explicitly teach the use of apostrophes and commas, as this appears to be a weakness for many candidates.

Review formal register and appropriate Paper 1 style.

Many candidates show signs of careless mechanical errors; the effect this has should be reviewed with candidates, as well as the need to revise if time allows.

Too many candidates included colloquial and informal language.

Help candidates not to describe but to analyse. Attention to technical accuracy with particular attention to correct sentence structure, use of apostrophes and semi-colons.

Teach candidates to proofread for errors before submission in order to correct basic errors such as: tense and number agreement, spelling, article use, informal register.

Higher level paper two

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-4 | 5-8 | 9-10 | 11-13 | 14-16 | 17-19 | 20-25 |

General comments

This year's exam was similar to those of other years, with both accessible questions and more challenging ones to appeal to those who wanted to explore less-travelled paths. The responses also reflected that same range, from strong well-developed papers to those that were vague, general and descriptive.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Some candidates tended to simplify the questions and only focused on part of what was being asked such as identifying female characters who were important but not showing "how women are stronger than men"; or identifying "contextual elements" but not showing how they allowed the text to be better understood.

Some candidates struggled to find questions around which they could build their arguments. At times they appeared to present what could best be described as random bits of information, including snippets from internet sources, notes, practice essays which were then awkwardly inserted into their essays. These fragmented pieces of knowledge (with or without understanding) were not always organized around a thesis (taken from the question).

Failure to define the terms of the question made it difficult for some to maintain relevance or focus in their responses. This resulted in quite a number of sweeping generalizations and in descriptive essays with limited literary analysis.

Criterion C: Understanding of the use and effects of stylistic features is still a challenge for some candidates who fail to see the hand of the writer in their texts. For others, integrating stylistic features and their effects into the overall analysis also proved difficult resulting in awkward and redundant statements such as “my first point is ...”

Some candidates have a difficult time with the language – awkward syntax, spelling issues and punctuation problems while writing legibly for some is also a problem, leading to arguments which cannot be deciphered.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

While the above may have been true for some candidates, there were many candidates who were well prepared for HL Paper 2. These candidates knew the works well and were able to provide appropriate illustration through textual references. These candidates wrote longer, developed and engaging responses which were focused and detailed. They showed that they are capable of formulating clear arguments around a thesis and understood the terms embedded in the questions. Their papers were well organized with clear introductions, arguments and conclusions which were a joy to read.

Most candidates could competently integrate quotations into their paragraphs in a fairly seamless manner.

Candidates seem to be well-versed in knowledge of context. Historical context was a very strong point across most of the responses, from colonial Africa to segregation in the Southern American States and the restrictions of the Victorian era. In addition, candidates showed very detailed knowledge of the authors’ backgrounds, the settings for the works and an insightful understanding of the socio-political climates which formed the backdrop for their texts.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Question 1. This was a popular question and almost answered universally around how the “content” “subverts norms”. Only a handful of candidates dealt with “form” or “conventions” or “traditions”. While some candidates only generally addressed these norms, the better responses showed how the norms (for example the society of Gilead) arose from the realities of the author’s context (in this case – 1980s America) and illustrated that this contextual information is still relevant today. Other examples would be that the “norm” of striving for the American Dream was present in the 1920s for Fitzgerald as well as in the 1950s for Miller, or that the subjugation of women in Persepolis can be connected to the same issue for Ibsen.

Question 2 was also chosen by a fair number of candidates. While some of the responses lacked a clear argument as to how the women are indeed “stronger than the men” in the works

(only identifying strong female characters such as Lady Macbeth, or Hedda Gabler or Marjane), there were many who dealt with interesting comparisons such as Paulina compared to Gerardo or Roberto in *Death and the Maiden* or Hester compared to Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Question 3. This question on how good can come out of destruction or violence was not chosen by a large number of candidates but was fairly well handled by many of the those who attempted it. Some of their responses were (at times) overly creative in their definition of what could be considered “good” leading to vague generalizations or odd assertions of positive results (Hedda’s or Willy’s suicide or Marjane moving away from Iran). Some of these superficial responses were based on little textual support (Tom and Daisy finding love for each other again or Torvald finding out how Nora really felt about him or Paulina becoming a stronger person as a result of rape.)

Question 4. Not that many candidates chose this question on “strangers” or “strangeness”. Some candidates identified strangers or strangeness without answering the “how and to what effect” part of the question while others had very nuanced responses to certain texts such as Camus’ *The Stranger*. The lack of a clear definition for the terms of the question limited the variety of texts candidates felt were available to answer it.

Question 5. This question on the “formal characteristics of a genre” was the least popular. Those who chose it, tended to focus adequately on characteristics of the genres of their chosen works (plays allow an audience to be part of the work, graphic novels allow readers to visualize the situations, etc.), but the explanation on how these genres “influence meaning” was not always clear.

Question 6. This question on knowledge of “time and context” was a popular one which, as with question 1, most candidates handled fairly well. Some, however, showed so much context and biographical information that the content of the work was largely ignored (*The Reader* became a discussion of post-World War 2 issues in Germany; *A Doll’s House* became a general discussion of women’s position in society; *The Great Gatsby* became a historical look at the American Dream; *A Streetcar Named Desire* became a discussion on the old south vs the new south) and these generalized responses, at times, were unable to show the knowledge and understanding of their respective works. The better papers showed “how” this contextual information allows us to better understand texts such as *The Visit* or *The Reader* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The stronger responses recognized that they needed to focus on understanding the writers’ time and context and not on the internal contexts of the works.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

It became clear, that not all students were reading the directions thoroughly. We did come across essays where the student answered one essay question for one text and another essay question for another text. This also illustrates the need to make sure that candidates really understand, define and address the actual words, phrases and terms used in the question (writing an essay on the place of women in society instead of how women are stronger than men or misreading “knowledge of time and context in which they were written” for the time and

context of the setting or identifying examples of violence and destruction but not showing how good can come out of them).

Candidates need more practice on how to embed specific examples from the texts to better support their arguments. Some still tend to generalize or are rather superficial in the treatment of the works.

Candidates should be made aware of literary terms (specific to the genres used) and show how they contribute to understanding and interpretation.

In Criterion D: Organization and Development, conclusions which merely repeat word for word points made in the main body add little to the structure. A meaningful and credit-worthy conclusion should include one or two comments which show that the candidate has realized that the question has illuminated aspects of the works not previously perhaps considered.

Some candidates showed that they have a real difficulty with the English language as they struggled to complete sentences, maintain noun-verb agreements or organize paragraphs. Others did a much better job and these papers were a pleasure to read.

Handwriting continues to be an issue.

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Grade: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mark range: | 0-3 | 4-6 | 7-9 | 10-13 | 14-16 | 17-20 | 21-25 |

General comments

While there was much good work shown by candidates in their answers to the questions on this paper it was relatively rare to see responses that fully addressed the question and also integrated the student's knowledge of text and context. Indeed, lack of integration was a feature of many responses where the analysis of stylistic features, for example, was presented as a discrete activity that students found difficult to make relevant to their argument. Examiners commented on examples of paragraphs that began "The symbolism in ... challenges social conventions", or "The form of the novel shows how women are oppressed..." but subsequently showing a lack of understanding of how the use of literary features acts to support the text's exploration of ideas.

The paper was seen as generally accessible and clear, however, student responses often revealed that accessibility can also encourage rather limited or narrowly focused responses. This was most evident and clearly illustrated in question 6, which is discussed below.

A wide range of texts was studied and teachers are clearly being ambitious and thoughtful by attempting to offer students a wide range of material. However, ensuring that the texts are a combination that can be effectively written about together in this paper needs to be considered and students were frequently challenged by the fact that the texts they were working with were so dissimilar that it is hard to make them work in a single question.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

There was clearly evidence of good teaching going on this session and, though this remains present to some degree, there was less evidence that students were relying on delivering the readings taught in class, as opposed to engaging with the question and using that to show their engagement and understanding of the texts. Many students, however, are not reading the questions carefully, as will be seen in the discussion of the individual questions below.

There were, however, a number of areas where students appeared to be finding significant difficulty. The concern most commonly cited was the failure of students to discuss context effectively, showing, for instance how it can be used to help the reader to understand a text more fully. Instead it was often seen as a thing in itself with essays frequently spending too much time on accounts of historical context that were not relevant to the question or even to the text. This was surprising given that this is an area that had improved steadily over the previous sessions. Other areas where students were finding difficulty or did not seem well prepared are set out below.

Almost all the examiners in the senior team commented with concern on the high levels of inadequate language skills. This was manifest primarily in two areas:

A lack of sufficient language skills to cope with the demands of a language A course. This may be simply an issue of the challenges of appropriate placement of a student for whom English is a second language, or in some cases related to the academic quality of the student's first language. Schools should be praised nevertheless for the way they are giving students opportunities in this way despite the challenges entailed.

The second area of concern regarding language skills is about the higher levels of inappropriate register or weak expression observed. Examiners mentioned candidates who were "struggling to put ideas down" and found "much informal, simple diction". There were several examples where good ideas were barely discernible beneath language that often did not make complete sense with many basic errors such as in noun-verb agreement, omission of the article and very poor spelling and punctuation. At the other end of the scale rhetorical terms like *anadiplosis* were often dropped in regardless of their relevance and without full understanding of their meaning being shown.

The provision of supportive detail also seemed to challenge students. Many showed "understanding" of their works but failed to provide enough detail from the texts to show sufficient "knowledge." Focus in the response was at times almost entirely on context and "themes" to the detriment of any close analysis of the works themselves. Students also often showed a lack of basic historical knowledge in relation to their texts. Many students struggled

to write a reasonable response using two very dissimilar works: *Sorrow of War* and *Jew of Malta*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

It was pleasing to see that students generally knew their texts and were able to use quotation from them to support the points being made, though as noted above this was not always effectively analysed. One senior examiner commented on an increased and often judicious use of secondary critical material that supported an argument. A greater incidence of well-organized responses was also seen.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Question 1: this was a very popular question. Responses to it were, however, variable, the best gave a precise definition of the conventions and norms and how they were challenged. Many weaker responses neither identified the conventions/norms being challenged nor how the texts addressed them. Form was looked at only rarely though one examiner noted an excellent response which analysed how the modernist literary style of the works challenged conventions/traditions of the novel.

Question 2: responses here were again variable. Many were good but too often they did not discuss how women were stronger than men, simply that they were strong. Furthermore, a number of candidates selected this question despite having inappropriate texts such as *Streetcar* where it is difficult to show how Blanche can be considered stronger than Mitch or Stanley. A number of examiners noted that a significant number of responses selected texts where women are almost not present, *Kite Runner* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, for example showing that a surprisingly poor choice of question has been made in relation to the texts studied.

Question 3 was not especially popular. Students did not seem able to define “destruction” clearly and often saw violence as purely from war, with texts like *Maus* and *The Things They Carried* popular here. Few were able to show how good came out of it and often argued that the texts were simply cautionary tales and that good came out of something because a character learned it was bad and therefore to be avoided. When applied to historical events such as the Holocaust, as in *Maus*, this showed a worrying lack of understanding of the significance of such events.

Question 4. This was not commonly selected. When it was, the main issue seems to have been the inability of many students to define “stranger” and “strangeness” in terms that were relevant to their texts and their argument. Strong candidates were able, however, to offer some inventive responses on texts such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Outsider*.

Question 5. This was very rarely selected and students who did find it difficult to look at formal characteristics or even define genre beyond fiction and non-fiction.

Question 6. This was a very popular question. There were a number of excellent responses on texts like *Death and the Maiden*, where students were able to show clearly the aspects of the text that were better understood through knowledge of the time and context of their production. However, a large number of responses here dealt with the idea of context as something divorced from the literary aspects of the texts and were consequently often very superficial, at times focusing almost entirely on discussion of the context and in many cases simply summarising the historical background with limited relevance to the texts and no argument. The “aspects” of the work informed by knowledge of context and time were often not identified. Many students also went for low hanging fruit offering very basic exploration of the texts and their context and spent too much time discussing context that was given by the author, in *The Crucible*, for example, or where the knowledge, such as of totalitarianism in Soviet Russia for *1984* was that which the student might be expected to have some knowledge of already. “Time” was often ignored.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Examiners felt strongly that using activities such as peer review and marking exemplar texts are important here to give students clear ownership and understanding of exactly how the assessment criteria are applied. Many students did not answer the question, often appearing to misread it or simply ignoring aspects of it if they did not feel able to answer. Students need to be given clear guidance on selecting appropriate questions, understanding their demands and thinking about how to approach them rather than feeling they need to go straight into their response. Teachers should then, as one examiner wrote, “prepare students to be flexible in their approach to answering unfamiliar questions. Students should be taught in this way, through practice, and planning, how to use the text to answer the question, rather than using the question to show what they know about the text.”

The provision of supportive detail, including textual analysis that supports the argument being made, needs to be practised and the discrete analysis of literary features discouraged. Instead students need to be taught how to identify and comment on literary elements in areas of the text that otherwise deal with character, narrative and theme, for instance. This will promote a more cohesive analysis of content and style in relation to the question.

In general examiners felt that students need more practice in handling questions and developing clear arguments based on the defence of a thesis. This can be undertaken in many ways and does not need to lead to “teaching to the test” or limited and reductive approaches. Linking this to critical thinking skills and activities such as developing introductions and thesis statements that are then defended orally or peer reviewed can all work well here.