

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 9093/12
Passages

Key messages

Learners need to ensure that they read a wide range of material from a range of diverse sources – such as travel writing, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, newspaper articles, blogs, advertisements – so that they can assess not only the conventions and language associated with different formats and genres but also comment on the effects and qualities conveyed by specific words and phrases; they should be able to comment on how a particular extract is structured in the way that it unfolds and develops in terms of subject, mood and tone. Learners should be able to explore the contrasts and differences between the sections of a given extract; they need to move beyond identifying essential aspects of language and style such as personification, alliteration and punctuation so that the effects of such features are considered in relation to their context and the extract as a whole. Learners who write precisely and economically, maintaining a close focus upon style and tone, are those who tend to achieve best results. They also need to be able to adapt their own writing style to incorporate diverse directed tasks – for example letters, articles, diaries – and demonstrate secure familiarity with their conventions and style. A secure degree of technical accuracy – especially in the use of spelling, punctuation and tenses – is required at this level.

General comments

The selected passages for this paper offered a wide range of styles, settings and language features. All three texts were found to be generally accessible and, to differing degrees, engaging for the candidates. The rubric was also well understood with only a few candidates omitting the compulsory question. However, overlong directed writing responses were not uncommon. Candidates should remember that they are being marked for task focus as well as expression and accuracy. Largely speaking, though, the paper was handled with understanding and competence. Some candidates lacked the necessary language skills for passage analysis but there were some strikingly perceptive and well-written responses, notably in answering **Question 1(a)**.

In the case of most candidates, there was a clear understanding of the need to make precise connections between language features and their contribution to the full effect of the passage.

Less successful responses could often have been improved through more precise identification of effects; phrases such as ‘this makes the reader imagine the situation’ cannot be considered useful passage analysis.

There was a pleasing sense of purpose in the directed writing tasks, though enthusiastic engagement sometimes led to overlong responses.

There was a common tendency to devote the first paragraph of the commentary to a repetition of the question or a summary of the events of the passage. This, together with often quite lengthy consideration of the target audience, used time which would have been better spent considering key language features.

Question 3(b) offered a writing task in which the use of colloquial expressions was wholly justified by the style of the passage and the wording of the question. However, there was also some suggestion of a more colloquial and casual style in the writing of the commentaries. The approach to the writing of the commentaries should always be to find the best use of Standard English.

Some candidates were concerned to define the relative formality of the author’s tone, though this is only a useful exercise if related to precise examples of language use and effect.

Specific language features were generally well understood, but candidates must ensure that the features they identify, such as puns, are genuinely present in the passage.

Maintaining a consistent tense presented some significant problems, particularly in the case of conditional constructions; this was particularly evident in the directed writing.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) **Question 1(a)** was generally very well understood and was answered with obvious engagement by most candidates. There was often sustained and perceptive attention to structure, direction, imagery and a range of language features. Weaker responses resorted to a narrative approach with little analysis of specific language effects.

The uneasiness of Gogol and Sonia was well understood and illustrated, as was the overwhelming impact of the Indian relatives upon the children. Stronger responses picked up on the 'frosted doors' as symbolic of cultural division, and there was general comment on the luggage being 'unmolested'.

The second and third paragraphs were not tackled with as much confidence as the first, but were still largely well understood. The repeated reference to Gogol staring at the crowds was commonly remarked on but without always fully recognising the sense of fearful fascination it implied. The isolation of the children with their 'American haircuts' and 'expensive sneakers' was also remarked on but not always developed. Similarly, the alliteration of the final sentence was often referred to but not always with the implication of buried treasure suggested by the gifts being 'unearthed'.

The third and final paragraph was probably the least successfully handled of the three. There was good recognition of Gogol's interest in the room in which his Indian life might have been led, but other features were often omitted or left undeveloped. The passivity of Gogol and his presentation as an unengaged observer was often ignored.

Quotation was not always expertly used, with some candidates quoting at far too great a length, almost as if this constituted a sort of answer in itself; clearly it does not. Quotation from the passage should always be as concise as possible.

There was remarkably little comment on the use of the present tense and the sense of involvement in the situation that it conveyed.

A very few candidates took exception to what seemed to them as a patronising and indeed critical attitude towards India and Indian life and lost time and focus in addressing this. This was a wholly mistaken view of the approach of the passage, which many more understood as an affectionate and believable portrait of cultural awkwardness and misunderstanding.

- (b) There were some sensitive and powerful responses to this task, with a wide and often very convincing range of approaches to the character of the mother. Some candidates highlighted her regret at leaving India, others her disappointment at the attitudes of her children. A very few misunderstood the context of the response and placed the mother in an entirely different setting. Whatever approach was adopted, there was a general sense of pleasurable engagement with the situation and the uneasiness of the characters. On occasion, the sense of engagement encouraged the candidates to produce overlong responses and to lose focus upon the nature of the task.

Some of the more successful answers subtly developed the writer's attitudes towards her children, and a few made amusing use of the character of the aunt as a domestic tyrant.

Weaker responses tended to simply rehash a few specific incidents in the passage, such as Sonia taking Gogol's hand, without adding significantly to their interest.

Expression was generally accurate and appropriate but there was some muddling of the tenses, which might have been avoided by careful checking.

Question 2

- (a) This proved to be the less popular of the two optional passages, though it offered a distinctive style and a range of language features. The most effective responses engaged with the idiosyncrasies of the passage and many clearly relished the wealth of gamer references. Less successful responses struggled to make significant points and tended to dwell too long on features that they recognised and felt safe with.

Most of the candidates picked up, at least to some extent, the author's emphasis upon the difficulty of the game and of the challenge it represented to the player. Strong answers also often recognised the distinguishing elements of the breathless style of writing, picking out such examples as 'personality packed infinite runner platformer' to make the point.

Alliteration was embedded in the passage and was generally commented upon, 'devilishly difficult' and 'fleet footed' being the favourite examples.

Other features such as ellipsis and the personification of 'Harold' were noted but there was surprisingly little developed attention to the gamer's jargon which permeated the passage, such as 'the mouse and keyboard crowd'.

The style of the writing was often described as 'informal' or 'conversational' but only relatively few recognised the mixture of quite grandiose expression with slang and contemporary reference: 'Despite Harold's unwavering determination and enduring spirit, he does dumb things, like high fiving a cactus'. Some responses, having defined the passage as 'informal' or 'conversational' felt that no further examination was needed, though there was a considerable range of language features and effects to be considered.

- (b) Some of the most effective responses to this task were clearly focused on hobbies such as basketball, dancing or cricket, the latter being a particularly popular choice. Many candidates chose to describe another computer game and some of their responses went too close to replicating parts of the original passage.

The idiosyncrasies of the style, which had eluded some candidates in the commentary, proved more accessible in the directed writing. Features such as alliteration and listing were often gleefully used to create some effective writing. The alternation of lofty expression and terms specific to the chosen hobby or activity was often well handled and there were some imaginative and wholly engaged accounts of different games.

Question 3

- (a) This was a more popular choice with candidates than **Question 2**. This passage also had an idiosyncratic style and approach, which was not always considered in sufficient detail.

Most candidates made mention of the use of bold type to demarcate the various 'horrible bosses' and there was some recognition of the effect of the subheadings. Stronger responses tended to recognise the pattern within each of the subheadings, a description of the particular boss followed by a strategy for dealing with him or her. Less successful responses opted for a narrative approach, sometimes doing little more than summarising the contents of the passage, with very little attention to language features.

Most answers made reference to the author's fondness for alliteration when choosing the subheadings. There was also some general comment on the informal nature of the style, 'absolute stinkers' often being offered as proof of this. In fact, there was little that was informal about most of the passage, the tone being generally purposeful, businesslike, and clearly intended to be taken seriously. There was a recognition of the more sardonic statements made by the writer and this suggested to some candidates that this was primarily a comic passage, which was not really the case.

The use of rhetorical questions was generally commented on, as was the hyperbolic reference to the boss who carried on working after the office was struck by a meteorite.

The change of tone in the final paragraph was well understood but there was little comment on the quite Machiavellian advice given to those dealing with 'The Climber'.

- (b) There was a great deal of engagement in many of the responses to this task, some 'fabulous friends' being wittily and even trenchantly described.

Not all of the supposed friends were always presented in a flattering light and this facilitated a variety of approach which was perfectly allowable.

There was a far less adventurous approach to the structure of the answers, which was almost uniformly the same as that of the passage, with three introductory sentences and a series of subsections. The wording of the question asked for the response to be clearly based on the 'style and language' of the original but made no mention of form or structure. In fact, there was no necessity for the candidates to write about all of the five separate 'fabulous friends' and some of the better responses limited themselves to two or three developed portraits.

There was a wide range of titles chosen for each of the chosen friends and some were both pithy and amusing.

To some extent the proposed title of the task invited the use of a fairly relaxed form of expression, which was how most of the candidates responded. There was a great deal of American-inspired slang, with many 'fabulous friends' 'watching the writer's back' or 'looking out for them'. This was generally well managed, but accuracy of expression suffered in many cases and some responses strained to sound contemporary.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 9093/22
Writing

Key messages

Focus on the prescribed instructions within each question – for example, in this paper, creating a sense of 'drama and suspense' for **Question 1**, 'mood and place' for **Question 2**, and 'atmosphere and importance' for **Question 6**. Also, ensure the purpose for each question is understood; in particular, candidates often write narrative responses for questions requiring a descriptive piece, and vice versa.

Ensure time management skills are observed. Avoid overlong narratives in **Section A**, as these often lead to short, self-penalising answers for **Section B**.

Although practising past questions is strongly advised, also adapt to the live questions in the exam and avoid prepared, generic and formulaic answers.

Within the time limits of the exam, be prepared to spend a few minutes thinking about, and writing out, a short plan to ensure the sound structure of an answer. This strategy may well save time in the long run, if organised and efficient. For **Section B** responses, a paragraph plan is advised.

Candidates should be encouraged to read a wide variety of texts, including newspaper and magazine articles, both print and online, as background preparation for **Section B**.

General comments

For **Section A**, strong responses were those with an original flavour and a convincing sense of place, character or atmosphere; examples of this included when the reader was able to vicariously experience the feelings of the characters in **Question 3**; relate to the sense of drama and suspense enjoyed or endured by characters in **Question 1**; or explore the ironies of the different perspectives of participants of the birthday party in **Question 2**. Where some candidates fell down in their imaginative writing, it was often due to lack of structural control (sometimes a **Question 2** response was devoid of paragraphs) or a lack of suitable language devices to create effects. A number of answers were hampered by tense confusions, especially when attempting to create drama or a sense of time passing in **Question 1**.

The more successful **Section B** answers kept the target audience in mind throughout and adopted language and structural techniques to match that audience. Weaker responses were unable to use the conventions of different forms, establish a mature, credible voice, or develop a well thought out, logically organised line of argument. This was particularly true of some responses to **Question 5**, where an essay format was quite often used in place of a realistic speech, and in **Question 4**, where the approach adopted was sometimes overly formal or too generalised to connect with an audience reading a school magazine. While **Question 6** was attempted by the fewest students, those who managed the two-part structure of footage and comment generally produced successful responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

'The mist gradually lifted, revealing an incredible sight...'

This narrative task was generally managed effectively, and the stipulation that the story should be an opening posed few problems. Responses often used the given first sentence as a framework device, writing a backstory for most of the answer and returning to the 'incredible sight' as a cliffhanger element at the end, with various degrees of success depending on the effectiveness of the integration.

Many of the better responses concentrated on the possible drama and suspense encountered in far-flung destinations, often involving quest narratives – this option enabled some candidates to revisit the scene of the mist evaporating to create a suitable cliffhanger 'ending' leading to further possibilities in the rest of the (unwritten) storyline. Some responses used dialogue very effectively to convey a sense of tension between characters; one or two notably had archaeologist protagonists discovering the lost secrets of a distant past acting as a metaphor for the mist lifting. Some answers offered lengthy descriptions, especially of landscape, on the first page or two, but when these were used as a suitable background to furthering the narrative arc of the story, it was seen as a well-integrated device to engage the reader.

Less successful answers were dependent on switching immediately after the given opening sentence to a completely unrelated narrative which in some cases looked suspiciously like a typical 'drama/suspense' prepared answer – some of these candidates then seemed to forget to enclose this narrative with a return to the original 'sight'. Some candidates had apparently looked at a previous paper asking for a description of a 'mountain' and repurposed some of this material in a nominally narrative context. As such, a number of the current paper's responses began in an overly descriptive mode before attempting to incorporate some narrative tension, leading to some difficulty in integrating the two, very separate, halves.

Question 2

The child's birthday party

Many straightforward responses to this question were seen, listing the events of the party, the preparations for it and the feelings about how these occasions remind us of our attitudes to, and experiences of, the growing-up process. Candidates seemed to find it easier to write from the child's perspective, or at least to write more words about it, than from the parent's perspective; this parental view was often laced with guilt or cynicism in an attempt to use irony to give the reader a contrasting view, sometimes very successfully.

This difference between the innocence of the child's perspective and the cynical, if still loving, parent's experience created some of the most successful responses; sometimes the better answers managed to reverse this admittedly stereotypical equation – having the child be disappointed or disgusted at the parents' well-meaning though misguided attempts at doing their best. One knowing child saw the 'strictly "no food or drinks" leather couch' of the finicky, house-proud parents, suddenly turn into a 'throne for all the glistening gifts' in a notable example of effective imagery; one grumpy parent can only hear the 'ominous crunching noise, when an abandoned potato chip is stumbled on, invoking my ire'. Another often effective way of involving the reader was to write the whole answer in the third person, thus contributing some authorial comment to satirise or otherwise analyse the two contrasting views.

Many of the less convincing responses were undermined by technical errors. Lack of paragraphing was a frequent occurrence, even when this was obviously needed for new feelings or descriptions of events. Tense confusions were common when grappling with the passing of time between the party and previous occasions, including the birth of the child. Many of the pieces from the parent's perspective were too short, often reflecting a dismissive cynicism about the event, or (typically) fathers who had to waste time by taking a break from work pressures. Though this could have been a successful strategy, as in the example noted in the previous paragraph, it was too often a reason to finish the answer quickly after having written an overlong list of the child's expectations and enthusiasms.

Question 3

Waiting

This question elicited some strong descriptive writing from those candidates who adhered closely to the task; however, some candidates mistakenly wrote wholly narrative responses, despite the clear stipulation that ‘a descriptive piece’ was required.

The better answers conveyed an effective sense of time passing – or not, as in the case of the more frustrated characters. Some tension was generated in the typical situations involved in describing a waiting room (often in a hospital or train station) or results day at college. In one example, three relatives waiting anxiously in a hospital corridor evoked the following feelings: ‘one looked guilty, another looked furious and the last one looked desperate’ – all these characters had their own secret reasons for these emotions which were then spun out rather effectively by the writer during the time it took for the doctor to emerge with a diagnosis of the relative’s illness. Sometimes single characters were engaged in reliving the past (usually involving unrequited love): a lover’s laugh was described having a ‘melodious tone in your head like a broken record but you could never get enough of it’, thus enabling the protagonist to muse over what might have been, and thereby use the temporary narrative device to drive the description of the narrator’s feelings.

Less successful answers merely constituted a narrative response with some indications of a character ‘waiting’ for a loved one and/or missing person, using the time spent waiting as little more than a brief framing device for the lengthy and at times irrelevant details of the ‘story’ of their life.

Question 4

Who needs money?

Some very effective answers were seen for this question, which was the most popular in this paper; it gave candidates the chance to discuss a topic which was obviously close to their personal experience, but also reflected across the different cultures, age groups and social classes. Although some answers did not specifically involve ‘social life’, leeway was given if the candidate spent the first, say, third of the article setting the scene by talking about money dilemmas in general, before embarking on the ‘advice’ part of the piece. Various degrees of formality were used to successfully engage the reader. This question called for significant emphasis on planning and organisation in order to produce a coherent and logically sequenced article.

Many of the better responses had a clear understanding of the article format, and engaging and enjoyable answers were seen which had a strong and lively voice as well as thoughtful and interesting content. Some examples used subheadings as either witty rejoinders to hypothetical reader reactions or, more prosaically, to indicate what was coming next. Common appropriate tips included saving money on expensive restaurants by indulging in some fun food-making at home with friends, and excursions into nature for the benefit of the fresh air. One such response involved ‘fauna enthusiasts’ heading off to ‘the supercool Crocodile bank conservation centre’ to get in touch with healthy living and interact with the animals. Other activities included volunteering or otherwise selfless commitments to help elderly or disadvantaged members of society; if not taken to moralistic or hectoring extremes, this did sometimes cast new light on what it means to be usefully social. One response offered the unusual angle of cheap travelling by staying local because ‘we haven’t even explored our own town’. Another effective ploy was to explore some simple strategies to combat revision fatigue, including the pleasure of reading a ‘favourite science-fiction novel or that nail-biting suspense thriller’; after money has been saved during the week, the candidate pragmatically advises their readers to spend a bit of money at the weekend – this is ‘a way to motivate yourself and stop opening that wallet all the time’.

Less successful responses tended to list the possible cheaper alternatives in a generalised way, without much specific detail beyond the money saved. Clichéd situations – such as hanging about in the park, or watching a film at home with friends rather than paying for a cinema seat and the obligatory popcorn – were sometimes unconvincing and were often followed by an apology to the reader for being boring, as if the article needed always to be a pep talk. Other generalised remarks about the value of friendship sometimes led to an overly moralistic and/or bombastic tone that was not wholly appropriate to the task.

Question 5

Sharing one common language

This question was generally answered effectively, and a wide range of strategies were attempted. Many candidates were able to write realistic speeches, to bear in mind a listening audience, and to at least attempt to create contrasting voices as well as opposing points of view. The question gave candidates a chance to analyse which existing language would be suitable for such a purpose, with English being a commonly considered candidate. A number of candidates, by contrast, chose not to mention specific languages, meaning that the 'agree with' speech was often rather generalised, calling in a moralistic or uplifting fashion for the unity of all mankind. Very few responses discussed the advantages of automatic translation facilities (beyond the apparent shortcomings of 'Google Translate'), or about the supposed benefits of artificial languages such as Esperanto.

Many of the better responses established combative opposing stances between those who advocated a 'common language' as the solution to economic, social and cultural disparities, and those speakers who saw those differences as signs of a healthy 'diversity', an essential connection to ancestors and traditions, and the healthier aspects of patriotism. Attentive 'speakers' often referred to their opponents' words when refuting them. One of the more creative responses treated all these oppositions as various metaphors, including a view of common language as a 'code for the combination of machine parts'. Another powerful metaphorical link was made in a response that described the unfortunate possible emergence of a unified communication process being that of individual languages 'forcefully morphed into one [common language], resulting in a genetic mutation'.

Less successful responses often favoured a vaguely idealistic preference for the 'agrees with' side of the debate. More candidates might have explored the experience of someone who is obliged to learn English for the sake of education and access to scientific information – answers which did not mention any specific languages, either the ideal 'common' one, or others which would have to be sacrificed, were obviously at a disadvantage. Rather generalised references to 'culture', 'tradition' and the difficulty of teaching seven billion people a totally new language, were often unconvincing. Candidates need to remember to write two pieces when tasked to do so, thus enabling a contrasting approach, and also to ensure that their speeches do not lapse into a more essay-like mode.

Question 6

Script of a voiceover

While this question elicited the fewest responses from candidates, many were of a good standard. One example which took on this challenge successfully involved a visit by Barack Obama to India. The range of different activities the president undertook were shown in an edited review of various events in a three-day visit crafted into a montage, including an 'exclusive lunch party' but also a visit to a school where Obama joined in with 'cultural singing' and sportingly wore 'traditional Indian hats'. He showed his willingness to mix with ordinary people by 'chattering freely with the kids' and also learned about local culture by attending displays of 'Indian mythological drama, to give a glimpse of Indian history'. Another response helpfully used viewers' comments that had been sent in electronically during the programme to update and summarise the presenter's previous commentary and voiceover.

Less successful candidates did not effectively manage the two-part nature of the question and did not always clearly separate the voiceover from the comment; when they did, the comment sometimes appeared before the footage rather than 'afterwards' as required by the question.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 9093/32
Text Analysis

Key messages

Candidates should prepare for this component by gaining a solid knowledge of linguistics which they can apply when producing a piece of Directed Writing, commenting on the style and language of that piece of writing in relation to an accompanying text, and when comparing two texts on the same subject for their different styles and use of language.

For **Question 1 part (a)** the accompanying instructions and text provide the context and background information to guide the candidates as they produce their Directed Writing text. In producing their reworking of the original text candidates ought to concentrate on making carefully considered choices of appropriate lexis, register and tone to suit the task set and ensure they achieve the highest possible standards of accuracy and expression in their writing.

For **Question 1 part (b)** candidates need to ensure they compare both the style and the language of the original text and their own, with a clear emphasis on selecting the aspects of language from both texts that may be analysed to demonstrate the specific effects that are created.

For **Question 2** candidates need to identify specific features of each text's language and style, relate these to supporting textual details to examine the specific effects produced and compare how the texts' differences in purpose, context, and audience affect the creation of different meanings.

General comments

Many candidates were evidently well prepared for a component designed to test their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of linguistics, and to analyse texts in a comparative fashion. A very small proportion of the responses to **1(b)** and **2** appear to have resulted from candidates chiefly 'gleaning hints' from the information provided in the questions' instructions rather than carefully analysing the texts themselves. It is good to note that very few candidates produced short passages of superficial commentary.

Question 1(a) is a Directed Writing task. Candidates need to follow the instructions carefully to produce a written response informed by the style and language of the accompanying text, in this session a transcription of part of a job interview. Their reworking (or recasting) of the original text should incorporate recognisable conventions of the text type identified in the instructions; in this session it was an email message from an interviewer to a manager reporting back about a job interview. Careful consideration of the target audience (the manager) and the requirement to clearly convey a particular perspective (outlining how suitable the candidate is for the job) is required. Candidates are instructed to produce responses of 120–150 words in length and were expected to write clearly, accurately, creatively and effectively for the prescribed purpose and audience.

A good working knowledge of linguistics is indispensable in responding to **Question 1(b)**, where candidates are required to compare the style and language of an email message from the interviewer to a manager reporting back about a job interview produced for **1(a)** with the style and language of a transcription of part of that job interview. Here candidates are assessed for the ability to select and analyse specific textual details, for example those concerning purpose, register, format, and choices of lexis, and the ability to support with close textual reference their evaluation of the language found in both texts. Key discriminators in the most informed and substantive responses were recognition of the level of fluency and the range of lexical choices exhibited in the transcription, and comparison of the effects produced with those in the candidate's own reworking.

In **Question 2**, a sound knowledge of linguistics is again required as candidates are assessed for a comparative appreciation of the texts' forms and conventions and awareness of their effects; an understanding of how purpose, context and audience shape meaning; and an appreciation of linguistic techniques. It is very important that candidates employ some form of comparative approach. A topical approach guarantees continuous comparison in which a concluding section can be used to emphasise the essential similarities and differences between the two texts and the relative strengths of each. It is good to see that a significant proportion of candidates adopted a topical approach this session – these also tended to be the candidates who demonstrated the most comprehensive linguistic knowledge.

It is again worth reminding both Centres and candidates that **Question 1(a)** accounts for only one-fifth of the total marks available and that the analytical and comparative nature of the tasks for **Questions 1(b)** and **2** require adequate time for thorough assessment of the texts and the writing of detailed responses. Candidates are therefore strongly advised to complete **Questions 1** and **2** within one-hour time allocations, having begun to carefully assess all the texts (three in total) in the initial fifteen minutes of the examination (the total length of the examination being two hours and fifteen minutes).

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The directed writing candidates produced usually featured solid engagement with the form and style of an email message from an interviewer to a manager reporting back after a job interview about a particular candidate named Riya. Most candidates successfully created the persona of an objective and fair-minded senior staff member who had conducted the interview with Riya. Reworking chiefly consisted of utilising pieces of information conveyed by the interviewee in support of her application; Riya's major in business administration and previous experience as a financial assistant were very frequently cited in a favourable manner. Riya's ambition to become a bank manager and to work abroad later in her banking career and the manner in which she once successfully defused a difficult situation with an angry customer were also fashioned by candidates into strong recommendations that the manager seriously consider hiring Riya. Most candidates showed excellent understanding of the conventions of an email message through the incorporation of the recipient's email address, subject line and date as well as a formal salutation and respectful signing off. Only a few candidates simply produced the body of the email message. Very good appreciation of the business context was usually registered through suggestions that Riya's CV could be forwarded upon request (or was already attached to the message) and that a brief meeting could be scheduled to discuss the matter in person if so desired by the manager.

The very few weak responses were either too perfunctory in their support of Riya or were not supportive of her on the basis that her English is not strong enough for someone working in a bank (where the transcription reveals that Riya's spoken English is grammatically correct and, according to the interviewer, she has 'excellent' pronunciation). Some candidates dwelt too much on the incident with the angry customer or chiefly reported facts about Riya without the required focus on the interviewer telling the manager how suitable she is for the available position. In strong responses candidates ensured the most pertinent points about Riya could be easily extracted by the manager, sometimes via bullet points but usually through strong discourse markers highlighting in turn her qualifications, past experience and evidence of her good manner with people (both colleagues and customers).

Most of the candidates abided by the guidelines concerning the length of their responses (120–150 words) although a few wrote considerably longer pieces that did not best suit the form and purpose specified.

- (b) This question rewarded candidates who attempted to analyse style and language and to directly compare different approaches and features in the two texts available to them, the transcription of part of a job interview and the email message from the interviewer to a manager reporting back about a job interview produced for 1(a). Only a few candidates did not apply a suitable methodology to analyse the transcription. Overall it was apparent that most candidates had been adequately prepared to analyse a transcription of a transactional conversation such as one occurring during a job interview.

Some candidates did not adopt an integrated approach, and sought instead to deal with each text separately. Textual references were often made without drawing conclusions concerning their functions and lexical properties. Such approaches usually yielded thin and perfunctory responses.

Integrated approaches were almost invariably used to good effect when candidates clearly identified the impact of lexical choice exercised by the speaker in the transcription and then examined their own carefully chosen vocabulary in their website piece in a comparative fashion. By so doing such responses achieved an equal, or very nearly so, comparative emphasis of 50:50 or 60:40 on the transcription and the email message.

A very few candidates exerted a lot of effort to merely list the elements of spontaneous speech they found in the transcription with little attention paid to the email message. Some candidates reiterated at length what they know about politeness strategies and Tannen's theory about the differences between men and women's communication styles with little supporting examination of pertinent aspects of the texts.

The majority of candidates demonstrated adequate or better knowledge and understanding of at least some of the conventions of a conversation between two speakers (especially turn-taking with a single cooperative speech overlap). They could usually reflect on the question-answer format of the interview and how Riya's frequent pauses resulted from the need to formulate the most precise responses in a stressful situation. In addition most candidates recognised that both the interviewer and Riya had been in similar situations previously and that the interviewer had likely prepared his questions and the order in which he would ask them and she had possibly rehearsed responses to common interview questions like those found in the transcription ('so tell me a little bit about yourself Riya', 'where did you learn English', 'so what do you want to do long term'). Candidates usually recognised an email message would be drafted, edited and polished by the interviewer before sending it to the manager. There was usually some selection and examination of examples of the manager's phrasing to respectfully impart his opinion about Riya's suitability for the job for the benefit of a senior colleague making the final decision.

In strong responses candidates made use of their linguistic knowledge to structure their response, for example by proceeding from word- to sentence-/utterance- to whole text-level in their examination of the texts. They correctly identified pertinent elements of style, quoted briefly and evaluated the effects produced. In relation to the transcription they examined the speakers' occasional use of stressed syllables for emphasis ('excellent', 'I was speaking just English', 'another country') and how the interviewer initiates each phase of the conversation and deliberately allows Riya to hold the conversational floor with her more frequent and longer utterances (especially lines 2–8 and 22–25). Candidates could additionally compare these and other aspects of the transcription with those they employed in their pieces of directed writing, usually comparatively analysing the business jargon used by the interviewer and Riya to the phrasing of the interviewer's informed opinions about Riya and recommendations made to a senior colleague. It was sometimes recognised that the conversation was highly cooperative with backchannelling being used by the interviewer to encourage Riya to make detailed responses to his questions, and also by Riya to demonstrate that she had recognised the most salient aspects of the interviewer's questions (e.g. the repetition of 'angry' by both speakers in the final section of the interview).

Question 2

As was the case for 1 (b), candidates who did not attempt in responding to **Question 2** to analyse Text A and Text B's language and style in a comparative fashion demonstrated only limited appreciation of the techniques employed and awareness of the effects created. Some candidates often dealt too much with the content of both texts and with listing techniques they could identify. In such responses there was exhibited some recognition of the use of form and language to inform the readers of each text and to convey subject-specific concepts. Candidates who eschewed a comparative approach also struggled to identify and clearly explain the differences in purpose and audience between the two texts and the significance of the differences in their forms and the ways conventions were employed.

Most candidates demonstrated a sure grasp of how Text A, taken from an autobiography, offers both a more personal and balanced perspective on Usain Bolt's triumph in the 100 metres final at the 2012 Olympic Games as well as imparting more precise information about his performance on that occasion. Text B, taken from an online newspaper, offers some historical perspective while perhaps unusually adopting an almost fawning tone in regard to the sprinter. Candidates could usually establish how the audiences for both texts might be broad given the sprinter's considerable fame outside of athletics – Text A is plausibly of more interest to Bolt's fans than Text B (the latter text chiefly catering for readers with a general interest in sports seeking information about Bolt's historic victory). Only a few candidates demonstrated explicit understanding that Text B would have been published immediately following the 100 metres final (perhaps within hours, given its electronic source) while Bolt would have written his recollection of the same event for his autobiography quite some time afterwards (possibly many months and perhaps with editorial assistance from his publisher).

Many candidates could recognise elements of the internal monologue Bolt presents in Text A (interspersed to strong dramatic effect among the starter's instructions to the sprinters taking part in the race), chiefly remarking that Bolt is highly self-critical about his start ('...I knew my push had been bad') in contrast to the more ameliorative account of the start in Text B ('Having given the field a head start, he then accelerated') and the considerable praise of Bolt's engaging personality by the author of Text B ('He is charismatic, mesmerising'). Examples of figurative language in each text were usually correctly identified (similes were often carefully distinguished from metaphors) accompanied by some comparative evaluation of how Bolt's speed was represented in both texts ('I was like a sports car moving into top gear' in Text A and 'It was as if Batman had flicked the switch on the Batmobile.... We almost expected to see an ignition of white-hot flame at Bolt's tail' and '...tearing up the super-fast surface as if it could curl up beneath his feet as he went' in Text B being the most popular images selected). Basic differences in the subject-specific language used were usually appreciated, for instance Text A's many examples of sprinting terminology married to striking euphemisms for different phases of a 100 metre race ('an explosion away from the blocks', 'the perfect start', 'my drive phase', 'I glanced across the pack', 'I passed the 60 metre mark, then 65', 'everyone else fell off behind me') contrasted with Text B's more prosaic phrasing used for the benefit of its wider audience ('retain his Olympic 100 metres title', 'the ability to run faster than any other man', 'the man to beat').

In the strongest responses candidates explored the texts' structures and analysed language more efficiently and accurately. Text A's *in media res* opening and its chronological structure, shorter paragraphs and frequent discourse markers ('The crowd quietened down...', 'I moved after the ricochet of the pistol...', 'I focused on my technique again...') was usually deemed to be more accessible to readers, compared to how Text B oscillates between descriptions of the athlete's performance and assessment of how he is regarded by his admirers as much more than just a very fast sprinter ('A latter-day superhero', 'he went through his showman's routine'). In Text A Bolt's interior monologue was usually carefully examined to show how he revealed that he was anxious before the race started, in contrast to the more objective and retrospective account he provides of how the race itself unfolded, while Text B's focus on Bolt's behaviour after the race suggested the author had a dual purpose: to celebrate Bolt as a media personality as well as a successful sprinter.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 9093/42
Language Topics

Key messages

The paper examines candidates' knowledge and understanding across three key areas of English language learning. Positive marking is applied through the bands of the mark scheme. Candidates are expected to analyse the transcriptions and passages provided, and to develop a linguistic argument with possible counterargument.

In the lower bands, the candidate's control of English may be partial or there may be a simple or generalised response to the passage provided with only a brief mention of language theory. Here, candidates may rely on feature-spotting or assertion without robust linguistic exploration.

In the middle bands, there will be a developing analysis including a detailed and informed exploration of language, structure, purpose and context (**Questions 1 and 3**) or a detailed and informed exploration of the linguistic issue (**Question 2**).

Responses will achieve marks in the higher bands where the analysis is fully developed by applying appropriate theoretical examples to the exploration and discussion. These will be evidenced by a careful selection of evidence from the context provided. In the higher bands, the response will be full, comparative, balanced and articulate.

General comments

All three questions provided an opportunity for candidates to engage well across the three topic areas, and in many cases responses demonstrated knowledge and understanding gained from wider reading. Generally, in **Questions 1 and 3**, candidates showed a good grasp of the conventions of Conversation Analysis transcription. Most candidates responding to **Question 2** were familiar with the work of Crystal; some, however, chose mainly to provide a lengthy historical discussion which did not fully explore the linguistic issue.

More effective responses included short plans before beginning the essay and ensured that theoretical examples were entirely appropriate to the point being made. In some cases, however, it was clear that too much of the examination time had been spent on the planning stage, leaving too little time to execute the plan. Less effective responses offered brief comments on language theory which was not applied to the context provided, leaving the essay underdeveloped and the passages not fully explored.

Stronger responses were from those candidates confidently using a wide and appropriate range of linguistic terminology. Weaker responses gave a general description of language features which did not demonstrate an analytical exploration from a linguistic stance.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Generally, responses demonstrated familiarity with the conventions of transcription and conversation analysis. Candidates need to ensure that they do not confuse or conflate the terms elision and ellipsis, as these were frequently wrongly applied.

More effective candidates demonstrated understanding of the context of the text and provided thoughtful commentaries on the dysfluencies created by the context of an international video conversation. Less effective responses gave generalised assertion on ways in which a Thai dialect presented itself, which was not evident in the transcription.

Relevant language theories were applied and assimilated into the more confident discussions. Responses from stronger candidates compared the work of Lakoff or Tannen to that of Beattie or Zimmerman and West. Weaker responses discussed only genderlect theories with some candidates misreading the genders of the speakers. Weaker candidates also provided brief mention of Grice's maxims without full evidence of why these may be useful tools for analysis.

Stronger responses demonstrated a full understanding of the nature of the exchange and provided a developed comparison of the roles of the three interlocutors and the changing linguistic structure of the conversation within its overall purpose. Less confident candidates provided commentary on the socioeconomic background of the interlocutors without evidence from the transcription.

Question 2

Inevitably, in this question, candidates relied on their knowledge of the work of Crystal. It was clear that candidates had made use of the 'Relevant areas for study' in the syllabus, with stronger candidates having made explorations outside these. Wider reading and experience was often incorporated in confident, articulate responses.

Weaker responses used the passage as a platform from which to discuss only the history of the English language, although in doing so, candidates had a reasonable grasp of the timeline of development, the differences between pidgins and creoles, and the manner in which they are created and used. This stance led, however, to answers which were uneven and undeveloped.

Stronger candidates were able to engage with the issues from a personal standpoint, either relating illustrations from their own individual experiences or by reference to their country or region's approach to changes or developments in the use of official languages and English. Some of these answers were clearly very thoughtful and, rather than merely paraphrasing its argument, used the passage as a steer for their own.

Confident responses analysed the issue of language complacency and language death and took issue with Crystal's notion of English being in an 'unassailable position'. These candidates also compared Crystal's 'snowball' metaphor with that of Diamond's 'steamroller'. Weaker responses occasionally attempted a similar comparison albeit without developed discussion.

Question 3

More successful responses were those that considered the context, structure and purpose of the talk rather than providing an overview of subjects covered or merely describing the talk as a sisterly quarrel. Weaker responses detailed behavioural aspects rather than linguistic achievements of the sisters.

Less successful responses could have been improved by correctly identifying the stages of development of the interlocutors, particularly when discussing the work of Piaget. Many candidates provided only a 'deficit' model, describing nonstandard forms as 'mistakes'. Stronger candidates commented on the ongoing process of language acquisition and the different linguistic competencies demonstrated in the script, including adverbial phrase, tense, pronoun, turn-taking and object permanence.

Mention of theorists, such as Skinner, Bruner, Chomsky and Piaget, was made in weaker responses without full discussion, whereas stronger responses selected examples from the text, providing a linguistic discussion on the example and then explaining why and how this example tests the theory.

Stronger candidates compared the roles of the interlocutors, describing Zoe as taking an almost adult position, comparing fulfilled adjacency pairs with dysfluency features using an appropriate range of linguistic terminology. Weaker candidates mentioned features such as pauses, use of 'cos', and fillers with generalised description or assertion. As in **Question 1**, candidates often demonstrated confusion between elision and ellipsis.