

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01
Composition

General Comments

With narrative, descriptive and discursive options available in **Part 1**, the paper allowed a wide enough range for candidates to show their true ability in this component. The narrative choices proved to be far more popular than the others this year. **Part 2** was understood and completed appropriately by the majority of candidates. Examiners perceived an overall improvement in performance, with fewer scripts at the bottom end of the marking bands. Time management is to be commended as there were few short scripts or examples of candidates not finishing the paper. Lengthy, time-consuming first drafts are now disappearing in most parts of the world, although they are still enough in evidence for Centres to consider the worth of such a practice. Spelling was also considered to have improved, although in **Part 2** the difference between 'built' and 'build' caused problems for a number who might equally have been struggling with the tense. While some linguistic problems persist (especially the poor use of the apostrophe and the punctuation of direct speech), there was an improvement in sentence separation in most Examiners' opinions.

Please note that this syllabus will be revised with effect from the June and November 2011 examinations – see syllabus and specimen papers for further details.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1. Describe the scene and the reactions of the crowd when a young child is lost in a busy market or department store.

This was a very popular question, being rooted as it was in the everyday details of normal life for so many candidates. The market was a much more popular choice than the department store, although this did tend to vary from country to country. The candidate was either a willing or unwilling visitor, sometimes almost dragged by the parent to the venue to carry out the daily shopping. The lost child was variously known or not known to the candidate, a naughty/curious sibling or a complete stranger. One interesting approach was one essay which saw the incident from the child's point of view. There were varying amounts of sympathy for the mother. Thankfully, virtually all the essays of this kind ended happily with the lost child receiving at worst a good telling off and a reminder not to let it happen again. The essence of this question was that it was a description and it is worth emphasising that candidates will not gain a high mark if they simply turn the essay into a story. Admittedly, it would have been difficult to complete the task without some narrative thread but once we were at the market or the department store, the question made clear that it was the scene and peoples' reactions that were important. A minority of candidates gave excellent, vivid descriptions of distraught parents; they were good because they described how the parent reacted rather than simply saying they were upset. Similarly, the better candidates brought the market or store to life by describing vendors and their produce, the looks on their faces, the sounds they made. Weaker candidates were never quite able to get beyond saying that a child was lost, how he/she was looked for and what the police did. Linguistically, the use of effective adjectives was obvious with the strongest candidates, whereas the confusion of 'his'/'her' was more obvious with the weaker writers, as was the repetition of phrases such as 'the young child' and 'the busy market'.

Question 2. Are we doing enough to save the planet?

This was a very popular question indeed amongst better candidates and produced some outstanding answers in a range of styles: discursive, rhetorical and polemical. It was very obvious that this was a topic close to the hearts of many candidates and they wrote about it with great expertise and detailed knowledge, aided no doubt by many classroom debates – this really did prove the worth of discussion as a means of preparing candidates for this exam. Equally true is that the better essays were in part at least informed by knowledge drawn from other subject lessons without actually becoming Science essays. These tended to show up the weaker candidates who, as always with the discursive title, lacked the ideas and linguistic ability to go beyond a repetition of thoughts and language. The strongest essays in terms of content were those which managed a sense of balance – rightly indignant for the most part but also able to see the economic pressures behind such problems. Most candidates felt that we are not doing enough to save the planet and they gave dire warnings about global warming and the disappearance of the polar ice caps – motorists were seen as the major culprits. There was understandably a lot of emotion in discussing the mistakes and greed that had brought this situation about and a number of candidates offered ideas as to how the situation might be improved.

Question 3. Write about an occasion when a rescue team arrived just in time to save lives.

Many candidates indeed enjoyed the narrative thread of this title and responded with exciting stories of fires, explosions and loss at sea, although many went beyond the bounds of credibility. At their best, the scenario was convincing with the verb forms maintained correctly throughout and a real sense of drama emerging. Better candidates exhibited a range of vocabulary, thus helping to raise the sequence of events above the routine. However, too many candidates spent far too long on the calamity itself and the build-up to the calamity and often the rescue was tagged on at the end. This raises the question of preparation for the exam. Candidates will quite rightly have practised many narratives, but they must expect in the exam to use that material properly and not just regurgitate an essay that appears to 'fit the bill'. Spending a lot of time talking about preparing food or packing the car for a day at the beach (equally true of **Question 1** in the case of the market) will never replace details of the emergency and in fact invariably created the wrong atmosphere. The content must be tailored to the requirements of the question or candidates will sound increasingly similar. This leads to a consideration of the use of prepared expressions and in particular prepared essay openings. Thankfully, these are disappearing slowly, but this year the opening 'A cursory stretch of the imagination summons from the recesses of my mind as if it occurred only yesterday the day when...' (at which point the title of the essay is introduced) came up very regularly and was clearly not the natural writing of the average candidate taking this exam. The essay usually ended with something along the lines of '...during my lecture of books, usually suffices to suffuse in my mental field...'. It may give confidence to have some openings and endings 'roughed out' to meet different needs, but they must be used sensitively otherwise they merely contrast with the majority of a candidate's work.

Question 4. Secrets.

This was not a very popular question. However, it was hoped that it would lead to a number of different interpretations and this was certainly the case. Most candidates included at least some narrative detailing an occasion when a secret was important. These were many and various: some involved medical secrets, some were about young love and others were about misdemeanours committed by the author who feared the wrath of a parent or teacher. The best of these narratives conveyed the sense of mystery or anxiety suggested by the title, especially when the writer maintained this for most of the essay. Weaker candidates were too keen to betray the outcome so that the narrative lacked tension. A few very able candidates used the title to discuss more philosophically the merits or demerits of secrets and the effects on those caught up in the secret. In the weakest candidates, this approach did lead too often to repetitive phrases and ideas: 'a secrets' was one such repeated phrase which jarred and was a reminder of how candidates must pay attention to basic agreement.

Question 5. Write a story in which a necklace is important.

As with **Question 3**, this was a very popular narrative choice. Some candidates were clearly aware of the Guy de Maupassant story involving a necklace and there were a number of re-writes of it, but overwhelmingly the answers were original. They involved the loss of a necklace that mainly had sentimental rather than financial value but, in what was a theme throughout this year, there was generally a happy ending with the necklace being found or returned. Examiners were impressed by the imaginative nature of many of the stories which used myths, legends and archaeological knowledge for inspiration to give an added importance to the necklace, as the essay title demanded.

Part 2

In **Part 2**, candidates were asked to imagine that the building of an activity park had been delayed because of objections from older people and they had to write a letter to a local newspaper about these objections. A large number of candidates responded extremely well to this task and were able to gain all five Content points very easily. The scenario allowed for a wide variety of parks and objections and this contributed greatly to the interest of the responses.

As is always said with this question, **Part 2** is directed writing and so is more of a reading task than **Part 1**. Candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points, this year a perfect answer had to have:

- a clear indication of where the park was to be located so that newspaper readers would be fully aware and not have to guess;
- precise details about what was to be in the park, keeping in mind that it was an activity park for young people;
- definite objections from the older people, especially related to the kind of park it was and the activities of young people;
- a number of benefits, again in relation to the particular nature of the park and young people;
- a request for support but in written form and for inclusion in the newspaper.

Where candidates failed to gain the Content points they were usually guilty of simply omitting the point or misreading the question or the scenario. There is sometimes a strong impression that candidates read the question rather quickly, get the general idea and then loosely follow the requirements. It is vital to remember in this task that it is partly testing whether a candidate can follow instructions as they would do in factual writing when they enter employment. The first bullet point is a good indication. If the Editor and readers of the newspaper are to know where the park is located there must be little doubt. The best candidates would give an address, either a street name or a recognisable destination such as 'next to the railway station in Port Louis'. Examiners were perfectly prepared to accept 'next to the supermarket' with the definite article in place because they realised that a small town might only have one supermarket. On the contrary, writing 'next to a supermarket' leaves it uncertain. Far less helpful is to write 'in our area' or 'in our locality', which is virtually copying the question anyway and is not at all specific. Some candidates cleverly got over writing 'in our area' by including their own address at the top, even though they were not instructed to.

As for what was to be provided in the park, there were huge variations. Some parks were small and had little more than some roundabouts and swings for young children; some parks were obviously intended to rival Disney World and included every activity known to man – realistically beyond the budget of most town funds. Nevertheless, both of these easily gained the point. Most, of course, struck a balance and carefully chose activities that were just that – active. It was very difficult to award points to candidates who chose just the inclusion of benches for a scenic view, or cards or dominoes as a suitable activity for young people. Many children will appreciate flowers but a park with nothing else will not qualify as 'exciting' as it says in the question. Additional provision of food stalls, library facilities, computer centre were all in evidence to complement the main provision and did so as long as the main provision was active.

The objections of the neighbours were most easily gained when related to the activities already mentioned by the candidate. Noise and an excuse to miss school were the regularly quoted objections and very appropriate in the context. A lack of parking space, a desire to have something else in the location, the destruction of forest land or traditional usage were just some of the variations, but it was difficult to credit some of these (e.g. noise pollution) when only a flower garden had been provided. Furthermore, it was difficult to understand candidates who were content simply to say they did not know how the neighbours felt or they had to guess.

Relaxation after school and the chance to take up or perfect a sporting interest were very good answers for the penultimate bullet point, but the weaker candidate often fell down by saying only that the benefit would be that older people could use the facility, even though the bullet point stressed younger people.

For the last bullet point, support was to be requested, and this was quite straightforward for most as long as it took a written form and was directed towards the newspaper. Some candidates were too vague and simply asked for support of a general kind or wrongly asked the editor to write in support. Rather too many candidates merely copied the bullet point itself or closely paraphrased it, which was very disappointing. It cannot be said often enough that the content point marks have to be earned. If candidates did poorly on this question, it was because they misunderstood the scenario, some assuming that the park had already been

built, some assuming that they had to persuade the editor of the need for a park. This misunderstanding then had implications for the linguistic mark as the misuse of tenses could be an issue.

As far as the linguistic mark was concerned, this was very much tied to the linguistic mark given in **Part 1**. An informative and persuasive tone was required, and most recognised and achieved this very readily. Given cultural differences, a wide range of letter endings was accepted but had to have both a valediction and signature. It must be repeated after last year that 'From' is considered insufficient as a valediction and too many candidates used this, although there had been some improvement. Once again, a reluctance to paragraph the letter penalised some; it is worth repeating the very good advice that unless a candidate has a very clear and effective alternative, using the bullet points as separate paragraphs is a good strategy; it is pleasing to say that Examiners reported a considerable move in this direction.

Guidance for teachers preparing candidates for future examinations

Much of the advice for improved performance is the same as that given in previous years. The lesson from this year's **Part 1** responses is that the descriptive essay should only be attempted by those who have a talent for such writing. The **Part 2** exercise this year proved that all the bullet points should be attempted as just by addressing the issue the candidate will gain a point. Texting language continues to be an issue with a minority of candidates and there is an overuse of the word 'gonna' or 'wanna' in a significant number of cases. Similarly, 'pen off' is still considered more than awkward by Examiners as a means of signing off in the letter and the colloquial 'kid' appeared in too many otherwise formal contexts. The proper punctuation and layout of speech can give problems, and a greater focus on this would pay dividends. Continued work on correct tenses will help the majority as this year there seemed to be more confusion of 'would' and 'will', as well as the 'built'/'build' confusion mentioned earlier.

Final comment

By its very nature this report comments on shortcomings and offers advice on good practice, but this should in no way disguise the fact that the marking of this component is an immensely enjoyable and enriching experience for all concerned. There is a very great deal of excellent expression and vocabulary amongst the candidates who take this examination. Where the best writing was seen, it really was of a very high standard indeed and a tribute to the hard work of both candidate and teacher. Given the time limit of the examination and many other considerations, it is amazing what so many young people achieve.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/02
Comprehension

General comments

The narrative topic of the passage seemed to be accessible to most candidates and to engage their interest; the school setting was chosen as being a fairly universal one for the candidates, appropriate and within their understanding and experience. The majority of candidates attempted all questions and completed a summary of the required length, although, as usual, there were some examples of brief or over-lengthy summaries.

The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Almost the entire range of marks was seen. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

Candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper, although not all managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy of their response to the summary question. Some candidates who did manage to produce both a rough and a fair copy did not delete the rough copy; the importance of remembering to do so has to be stressed.

Some Examiners reported candidates who wrote their answers, particularly the summary, through the right hand margin, making annotation of marks difficult. Some Examiners reported centres where pages were stapled together, sometimes through the candidates' writing.

The excellent setting out of answers – numbering answers and leaving spaces between them – was remarked upon by many Examiners.

The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text and assessment of the ability to express these points fluently and in own words. As in previous years, the type of question giving most difficulty was the question which required candidates to answer in their own words; some candidates seemed to ignore this rubric or, even when they identified the key words for recasting, found it impossible to find synonyms. However, Examiners continue to report a pleasing reduction in the number of candidates simply ignoring the rubric instruction to use their own words.

A few candidates wasted time by copying out each question before answering it, or by copying out the entire stem of the question in their answer.

Many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, and the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good.

Please note that this syllabus will be revised with effect from the June and November 2011 examinations – see syllabus and specimen papers for further details.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 was designed, as the opening question, to ease candidates into the examination with a fairly accessible test; however, this was not as straightforward as many opening questions in previous papers. The first mark was scored for writing that Benjamin was reluctant to get out of bed because he was enjoying a pleasant dream, and the second mark was scored for writing that he had to go to work, or that he had a day's teaching ahead of him. The difficulty lay in the fact that the first mark could not be scored by lifting

lines 1-2 ('Benjamin resisted the temptation to switch it off and snuggle back into the pleasant dream he had been enjoying'), as this did not answer the question. However, the second mark could in fact be scored by lifting lines 2-3 ('He experienced the familiar feeling of anxiety as he thought of another day's teaching ahead of him'), as this did answer the question. Some candidates failed to score here because they wrote that it was nearly the end of the working week. Perhaps some candidates did not understand the meaning of 'reluctant'.

Two marks were available in **Question 2**, one mark for the answer that Benjamin's grandmother had been a teacher of literature, and one mark for a reference to his own excellent teachers. Most candidates scored the easier, first mark here, but fewer were successful with the second point, writing instead that his parents had made sacrifices to ensure his education. In fact, any reference to his parents' sacrifices denied an otherwise correct answer in the limb in which it was offered. Many candidates lifted lines 6-7 ('She had filled his boyhood imagination with tales of wonderful candidates'), which was wrong on two counts: firstly, the agent was vague, and, secondly, it did not address the issue of the question, which was why he had decided to become a literature teacher, not just a teacher.

Question 3(a) was the first of the two questions on the paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. It was easier than some questions of this nature in that the candidates were not required to isolate the key words for re-casting, but were given them, namely 'preconception' and 'reality'. Many candidates were successful with 'preconception' offering correct synonyms such as 'perception', 'assumptions' or 'what he thought'. However, 'reality' proved more difficult and correct synonyms such as 'actuality', 'truth', or 'what happened' were less commonly seen; the main difficulty with re-casting this word was that there were few single word answers; instead, using phrases was often the best method to adopt. The mark scheme took this into account by allowing marks for answers where the contrast was seen in the sentence structure: for example, answers such as 'he thought the job would be easy but it was not' scored both available marks.

Two marks were available in **Question 3(b)**, one for each correct limb. The first reason why it might be surprising that Benjamin's poetry lesson had been a disaster was that he had spent a long time in preparation. This could not be scored by lifting at lines 11 -12 ('How confident he had been, remembering the hours of preparation that had produced the worksheets') as this did not answer the question – some distillation of the text was required. The second mark proved to be more elusive for candidates. It was scored for the correct answer that Benjamin had been sure that his love of poetry could not fail to win over the candidates. The mark could be scored by lifting from the passage at lines 12-13 ('His own love of poetry could not fail to win over the candidates, he had been sure of that') but failure to include 'he had been sure of that' denied the mark, as such a response failed to answer the question. Many candidates lost marks here because they failed to read the question properly; the question asked why it was surprising that Benjamin's poetry lesson was a disaster, not why the lesson was a disaster.

Question 4(a) was intended to be a discriminating question, and thus it proved to be, with many fewer than half of the candidates giving the correct answer, namely 'show'. The difficulty lay in the fact that, firstly, candidates had to understand the metaphorical idea of 'theatre' and, secondly, read through several lines of text to isolate the single word which extended the metaphor. The image of 'stealing the show' is also a difficult one. Popular wrong answers here were 'exaggerated', 'model' and 'lead'. **Question 4(b)** was the second of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words. Candidates had to isolate the key words for re-casting in their own words, thus making this question more difficult than **Question 3(a)**. The key words were 'admission', with synonyms such as 'sign', 'acknowledgement' or 'suggestion', and 'failure', with synonyms such as 'shortcoming' or 'incompetence'; phrase or clause answers were acceptable here too, such as 'that he was not a good teacher' or 'that he had not behaved properly'. Some candidates ignored the 'admission of failure' idea, writing instead about the general pointlessness of involving the Principal, or that Benjamin did not want Ahmed to be too severely punished. **Question 4(c)** proved to be a discriminating question, too. The answer was that, if Benjamin succeeded in improving Ahmed's behaviour, the behaviour of the rest of the class would also improve. However, many candidates merely copied line 23 ('they might do likewise'); this answer was incorrect because it was ambiguous, with connotations that the class would improve Ahmed's behaviour. Similarly, the lift of lines 22 - 23 ('if they took a lead from him in poor behaviour, they might do likewise if he behaved well') was insufficient to score, as the agent in this question, namely the class, had to be spelt out as it was not implicit in the question wording. The lift of lines 22-23, with the inclusion of 'he was the class's role model' did score the mark as it in fact answered the question.

Question 5 was a question which asked candidates to explain fully what was Benjamin's 'other problem' with his job. The answer was that he was working as a teacher in the School that he himself attended as a candidate, and that his former teachers did not treat him as a colleague because of this. The second of

these marks, for writing that Benjamin was not treated as a colleague, was scored by the majority of candidates, but the mark could not be scored by mere lifting at lines 29-30 ('now these men were just some of the teachers who treated Benjamin as an over-grown candidate rather than as a colleague') although some re-casting of the lift which included Mr Tullen or Mr Hemu, or the generic agent 'the teachers', could score the mark because it did in fact answer the question. The first mark was more difficult to score, as it involved making the inference drawn from lines 25-30 that he was working in his former School, and lifting of lines 25 – 26 ('Just because he had happy memories of his former teachers did not mean it was a good idea to accept a teaching post in his former School') did not supply the correct answer. Thus, many fewer candidates scored the first available mark than the second; two marks were rarely seen and the question proved to be a discriminating one.

As intended, the level of difficulty was stepped up at **Question 6**, and indeed very weak candidates were baffled by the entire question. **Question 6(a)** was a question testing the candidates' ability to make a sensible inference about Miss Siti's intention, namely that she intended to make Benjamin happy, welcome, proud or any one of a number of possible positive outcomes. One of the difficulties here was that weaker candidates were unable to distil the appropriate information from 'had the opposite effect from the one intended' at line 33. Many candidates opted for an incorrect answer which described actions by Miss Siti, rather than the intended effect of these actions. A popular wrong answer was a mere lift of line 32 ('there was no doubting her fondness for Benjamin'), but re-casting the lift as 'to show her fondness for Benjamin' scored the mark because it answered the question. Other wrong answers were that she was in love with him which, although a colourful interpretation of the text, could not be supported by it. **Question 6(b)** was a question on the writer's craft, and required candidates to decode the image of 'backbone' as the supporting, or main, or very important part of the human body. Thus answers such as 'very important', 'main' 'support' or 'the debating society could not cope without him' scored the mark. Popular wrong answers, such as 'the head' or 'the leader', showed comprehension of meaning but failed to decode the image. This was a question on the writer's craft, not a mere vocabulary question. In **Question 6(c)**, candidates had to appreciate that 'hollow' laughter indicates pretence, or failure to be amused. Thus answers such as 'Benjamin did not find it funny' or 'Benjamin was only pretending to laugh' scored the mark. Alternatively, the mark was awarded to candidates who gave an appropriate negative feeling, by writing, for example, that Benjamin felt embarrassed, or unhappy, or stressed. Popular wrong answers here were that Benjamin did not like Miss Siti, or that he was just trying to keep her happy. However, many more candidates scored the mark for **Question 6(c)** than for either of the other parts of **Question 6**.

Question 7 proved to be within the grasp of few candidates and was another discriminating question. The answer was 'fascinated', the only word which conveyed the sense of 'rooted to the spot'. Popular wrong answers were 'horror' 'froze' and 'rooted' itself.

The mark could be scored in **Question 8** only by writing that Ahmed was stammering, or that he could not speak properly. It was incorrect to write that Ahmed was no longer smirking, or that he was transformed, and such answers denied the mark in an otherwise correct answer because the question made it quite clear that only one piece of evidence was called for.

Question 9 could be answered in a variety of acceptable ways by giving a sensible inference which showed Benjamin's improved state of mind, or his optimism, about the future or about his job. Candidates were required here to make a general observation derived from a particular point and the majority of them managed to do so. Unacceptable answers were those which merely re-cast the question, for example 'his new life would begin the next day', or answers which were based merely on chronology, for example 'tomorrow is the weekend' or 'tomorrow is another day'.

Question 10 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. As in previous papers, Examiners reported a reasonable spread among the words and phrases chosen by the candidates, although 'in a flash' was the most popular choice and the mark was generally scored by candidates who chose it and offered synonyms such as 'quickly' or 'suddenly'. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered 'obvious' or 'reasonable' for 'logical'; 'plan' or 'system' for 'strategy'; 'unseen' or 'unnoticed' for 'imperceptible'; and 'spoil' or 'ruin' for 'thwart'. In fact, such is the richness of the language that there was found to be around fifty acceptable synonyms for 'thwart'. The least popular choices, and the worst scoring when they were attempted, were probably 'crucial', meaning 'essential' or 'critical', and 'gauge', meaning 'judge' or 'estimate'. A popular wrong answer for 'crucial' was 'important' – although 'very important' was acceptable, it was felt that 'important' was not forceful enough. A popular wrong answer for 'gauge' was 'see' or 'look at'. Candidates scored reasonably well by offering synonyms such as 'remember' or 'recall' for 'reminisce'. Examiners reported a full range of marks in this question, with very many candidates scoring three marks. They also reported, as usual, some

candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning, but such cases were very few. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another misconception among a few candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; such candidates must understand that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.

The final question on the paper, **Question 11**, was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise how it became increasingly clear to Benjamin that there was a snake in the classroom, how the candidates reacted to the snake, and the actions that Benjamin took to solve the problem. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. They were to draw material from lines 44 to 85, which was paragraphs eight to eleven inclusive. There were twenty two content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question, often with a rough draft and a fair draft. Almost no candidates forfeited their Style mark by writing their summary in note form rather than continuous prose.

There were six content points available in paragraph eight. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that Benjamin saw the papers in the bin move. The paragraph went on to explain that the papers lifted, that there was a hissing sound, and that Benjamin saw the snake's eyes, then its head, then its tongue. These were relatively straightforward points to make, and most candidates fared well in this area of the summary. In addition, there was no penalty for the details of the snake being reported out of sequence, which eased the level of difficulty even further.

In paragraph nine, another four content points were available, moving on to the second part of the rubric, namely how the candidates reacted. Ahmed pointed at the bin and told Benjamin there was snake, the other candidates stood up in alarm, and Ahmed was trembling. These points were not as straightforward as some candidates clearly thought; as ever, careful reading was required and many candidates failed to score here because they wrote that Ahmed was pointing at the snake, not the bin. The passage suggested that, although he had seen the snake, it was no longer visible by this time; otherwise the idea of the candidates 'picking up Ahmed's mood' is rather weak. Likewise, precision was required to make the point that Ahmed told Benjamin, not his classmates, about the presence of the snake. There was some confusion too about the meaning of 'rose to their feet'; many candidates forfeited the mark here by writing that the candidates lifted their feet up rather than that they stood up.

A further three marks were awarded in paragraph ten to candidates who wrote that Benjamin told the class to sit down and be silent, that they must not infuriate the snake, and that they must not make sudden movements or loud noises. To their credit, most candidates coped here with turning the direct speech into reported speech. However, they often lost a mark by referring to being silent without the idea of sitting down to do so, or by not understanding the meaning of 'infuriate', or by blending the point about not infuriating the snake with the point about sudden movements or loud noises – thus, there was often an unsatisfactory blend here which scored neither of the two available marks.

Paragraph eleven moved onto the third part of the rubric, namely what Benjamin did to solve the problem, and contained nine content points. Benjamin removed the worksheets from the box, crept over to the bin with box, and covered the bin with the box. Then he picked up the bin, holding the lid in place, indicated to Ahmed that he should open the door, carried the bin into the playground, where he left it in order to go to report the matter to the caretaker. As with paragraph nine, the content points here were not as simple as many candidates thought and required careful reading in order to extrapolate the appropriate detail. Many candidates wrote incorrectly that Benjamin held the lid, not the lid in place, or that he released the snake in the playground, or that he asked the caretaker to remove the snake. There was also much confusion about the respective functions of the bin and the box, again the result of careless reading of the text. Many candidates verbalised the command to Ahmed to open the door, and lost the available mark here.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported that ability to use own words, rather than those of the original text, varied from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre. Many candidates scored well on content points without resorting to inordinate lifting, and with good basic expression and reasonably successful handling of their own

reconstruction of the relevant material. Examiners reported a reduction in the number of very weak candidates who lifted almost indiscriminately from the text, producing little more than a random transcript which scored badly on use of own words and, inevitably, did little to pick up relevant content points. Some weak candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points. It seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, as has been reported in previous years, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. Sometimes the ultra-cautious transcriber did better than the ambitious, but not technically perfect, re-phraser. However, only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to grapple with the original text, re-shaping and re-casting it in original complex sentences, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Common errors reported were the usual failures of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, and insecure and illogical verb tenses.

Spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear.

In parts of the world where French is spoken, there was some confusion over masculine and feminine nouns and possessive adjectives with, for example, 'her grandmother' copied over grammatically but incorrectly from French into English from 'sa grandmere'. There was also confusion between French and English vocabulary, for example 'to make a dream' from French 'faire une reve' whereas English is 'have a dream'; 'ancient teachers' from French 'ancien' meaning 'former'. There was also confusion over articles. For example, English requires a definite article before professions, whereas French does not, so some candidates wrote 'he became teacher' rather than 'he became a teacher'. Conversely, English does not require a definite article before an abstract noun, whereas French does, so some candidates wrote 'there was a chaos in the classroom' rather than 'there was chaos in the classroom'.