

Cambridge IGCSE® (9–1) First Language English 0627 Specimen Paper 2 Examiner Report June 2015

This report has been written for **Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys** who kindly agreed to provide candidate responses for the new Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) First Language English (0627) Specimen Paper 2. Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition is 2 hours and untiered, and is worth 50% of the total marks. Paper 2 has two sections:

- Directed Writing
- Composition

Candidates answer one question from each section. Directed Writing has one question, based on two unseen passages. The passages are taken from either the 20th or 21st century, or both. Composition has one task from a choice of four: two descriptive and two narrative.

General comments

Responses to Paper 2 suggested that candidates found the passages and tasks generally accessible, had mostly planned their use of time helpfully and finished within the two hours.

The best responses to tasks in both Section 1 and Section 2, considered both audience and purpose – establishing a rapport and suggesting an ongoing relationship with the recipient of their letter in **Question 1** and attempting to draw in their reader through carefully positioned detail in descriptive pieces and narratives.

Narratives in **Question 4** and **Question 5** were often ambitious in terms of plot, and descriptions in **Question 2** and **Question 3** showed awareness of the possibility of evoking atmosphere by appealing to a number of senses. Mid-range answers occasionally seemed constrained by adopting a more formulaic approach – for example, introducing an outline of the question and what they were going to do in their opening to their letter and then recapping at the end. This might have been better suited for a more formal letter or discussion. The best answers here, though aware of the need to address the question, often went some way towards imagining themselves in the circumstances given. They adopted the role of a concerned younger relative with some conviction. Likewise, those descriptions in **Question 2** and **Question 3** choosing to move methodically through the five senses each time they revealed a new aspect of their picture, lost some fluency of style and missed chances to fully engage the audience. In this instance too, more emphasis on planning in advance of writing would have established a more complete sense of place or person in the eye of both writer and reader, helping mid-range scripts to capitalise more fully on their understanding and ideas.

For achievement in the highest band, descriptive responses in **Question 2** and **Question 3** needed to create well-defined images, drawing the reader into the imagined view and shaping the response to build to a convincing picture. The more generalised assertions of ‘rainbows of colour and noise’, crowds and ‘twinkles of light from nearby villages below’ though offering a potentially interesting starting point at times, needed more carefully observed detail and sense of perspective to create the scene for the reader. Grass seen far below from atop a mountain was unlikely to have easily visible ‘a charging cavalry of water droplets standing out in their glimmering blue coats’ or ‘fish of all shapes and sizes’ visible as they were carried by the water flow. Where first person narrators were used such unexplained detail was less credible. Devices to allow for observation of close detail needed to be planned deliberately in order to avoid sudden shifts in position or unlikely suggestions of what might be seen, heard or smelled from a position up high. Deciding where the scene was and how the perspective might be different when viewed from above meant some answers began to offer interesting and thoughtful detail. More careful planning and adaptation of ideas might have helped to develop a number of answers to target more specifically the focus of the question. Some general descriptions of setting often lost sight of the task and were less effective as a result.

Ambition with vocabulary in **Question 2** and **Question 3** at times paid off, with some interesting choices. On occasion however, choices were less appropriate or successful. The best answers considered not just individual words but their cumulative effect overall. Knowing what they wanted to achieve, their intended effect on the reader, was a feature of the stronger responses. Though ambition occasionally overtook control, answers that decided on the mood and atmosphere they wished to convey were often able to draw their reader in with evocative images and suggest more successfully something of the place, real or imagined – that the writer had in mind. At times, mid-range answers needed a more secure sense of why the words chosen were being used – to what effect – in order to avoid undermining the overall picture and/or clouding meaning. For example, ‘My mind started savaging though my restless brain of glamorous memories’, suggests that the writer was at pains to vary vocabulary, but is potentially confusing for any reader trying to pick up clues of what to expect and does little to help them imagine the scene captured by the photograph in **Question 2** which might have had this effect.

In narratives for **Question 4** and **Question 5**, deciding at which point to open the story rather than starting at the beginning and following through a plot plan chronologically might have helped produce more balanced compositions where back-story details necessary to understanding were woven in to the tale, rather than set up laboriously at the start. Narratives attempting to cover too much plot might also have benefitted from consideration of which part of the story to tell and how. Similarly, a number of descriptions in **Question 2** and **Question 3** needed more careful shaping – for example through use of device such as a progression/shift in time or telescoping of focus in order to move the composition forward and build up a convincing overall picture. In **Question 3**, arriving at ‘the top’ in daylight, and watching as dusk falls then turns to night was one option for those who chose to position themselves on skyscrapers above busy cities. Those clambering the final centimetres to then stand atop a mountain might well have enjoyed a panoramic view and/or taken out binoculars to focus in on detail from a distance. Planning such approaches before writing would have helped answers in the mid-range, where often a number of potentially interesting ideas were listed in no obvious order rather than combined into a convincing overview. In **Question 1**, not having planned the route through beforehand meant less effective argument or informed discussion – with potentially successful answers offering lists of points rather than building a considered and convincing case.

Guidance on the number of words to write for each task is there to help plan the time to spend on an answer. Whilst over-long or unusually short responses are likely to be self-penalising, there is no requirement to produce a set length. The piece though needs to have a form and shape of its own. Rather than spending time counting exact numbers of words, a rough estimate instead might have freed up precious minutes to check for those unforced errors evident in a number of scripts. Otherwise mainly accurate, a number of answers could have improved their level and impact through more careful checking and correcting of punctuation and grammar.

Question 1

In **Question 1**, there were very few significant misunderstandings of the content of the two passages, though some answers would have benefitted from more careful reading. In discussing the Homeshare scheme, there was occasional misreading of detail, for example, suggesting that the young(er) person would be opening their home to the older rather than the other way round, as well as a tendency to miss opportunities to fully exploit details or make connections between ideas across the two texts.

Reading both passages very carefully, more than once, including any introduction offered to each passage, is important when targeting higher bands especially. Successful evaluation of implicit meaning depends on having picked up those hints, suggestions and details not necessarily evident on first reading. Likewise, offering a convincing overview involves assimilation of ideas from both texts, as well as taking account of the differing perspectives within them.

Copying was rarely an issue in **Question 1**, with relatively few responses over-reliant on the language of the passage. Occasional lifting of key phrases and/or close paraphrase was noted though for the most part the need for own words was understood.

Accuracy as regards use of punctuation and grammar in timed conditions may well be an area for future focus in some cases, looking to develop strategies for avoiding unforced errors. A number of answers showed some style and potential flair and might well have been more effective with fewer slips, for example in the use of full stops and/or tense.

Whilst there was evidence that ideas had been collected/amassed ahead of writing – for example, a spider diagram, responses might have benefitted from further consideration of the most effective combination of those ideas. In a number of responses to **Question 1**, planning the shape of the answer as well as the content would have helped to target higher bands – avoiding sections simply listing advantages or disadvantages without building an argument.

In order to demonstrate the skills necessary for higher bands in **Question 1**, responses need to both use and interpret the evidence in the texts – explicit and implicit – standing back from the passages in the light of the question. Ideas and opinions from both passages should be considered and evaluated for use in the response, rather than material from either or both being repeated mechanically. Where additional information and guidance is offered – for example in the introduction to a passage or the question itself, attention to the detail provided helps to target more specifically the requirements of the task. For example, careful reading of the two introductions would have helped to establish that the Homeshare scheme had something to offer both parties involved. The scheme addressed both the need for help in the home in a climate where such help was harder to come by and likewise had value for those facing difficulties in finding suitable, affordable housing. Close reading of the question would have reinforced this idea, inviting consideration of the benefits from both perspectives whilst suggesting that there may be potential disadvantages to consider too. Details of the relative's situation made it clear that they wished to remain independent. A number of answers made reference to the scheme as a way of avoiding care homes. Fewer considered the potential problems if the match was less than perfect or picked up on the implications of the examples in the text. Quoting examples, rather than considering what they might suggest, meant opportunities were missed. The case of the Irish girl who didn't return was often used simply as an example of the unreliable young, missing what it suggested in more general terms for those young people who might sign up as young as 19 years old and find themselves away from home with responsibilities for which they were not equipped.

Instructions for the task made it clear that the relative knew at least something of the scheme already. It was not then a good use of time to spend the first half of an answer simply outlining the scheme itself in factual terms only and inventing scenarios for how the writer had come to hear of it. Better responses imagined themselves into the situation as described and kept the recipient of their letter in mind throughout. Polite, yet friendly, many of these were quite convincing in the register they adopted initially, though it was not unusual for the response to slip into a more factual, less personal, style once ideas were being outlined. Some adopted a rather more formal approach than a letter to a relative perhaps demanded, reporting the material from the passages rather than using the information and ideas to create a new piece. Setting out what the writer is going to do in a letter (I'm going to outline the scheme and tell you about the positives and negatives) is one way to orientate the writer, though perhaps less useful for the reader of this letter who was looking for personalised advice.

Answers detailing the experience of Beth and Barbara and ending with the general assertion that there are positives and negatives of most things, or that the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages without saying why in particular in this case, were missing the chance to demonstrate understanding of implicit ideas in particular. This relative wanted to help others, keep their own independence and was considering taking part in an innovative new scheme – assumptions about elderly people were possibly understandable but often misplaced. Close reading would suggest that medical care was not part of the scheme – a friend who required it needed to make other arrangements we were told. Assertions that sharers would be there to treat various diseases and wash or dress the relative perhaps needed to consider the parameters of the support offered and to what extent it might reasonably be considered a long term solution. Some touched on such hints in passing, though needed to plan their response more carefully beforehand in order to fully explain and exploit their ideas using details from the passage in support. Parties and damage to property were not mentioned in the text as possibilities, though a

vetting procedure to avoid such issues was. Picking up on the extent to which it would be possible to trust this 'crazy dating service' when inviting someone into your home might have proved more profitable as evidence of reading than extended speculation as to what could go wrong.

Many candidates were able to recognise at least some disadvantages for both sharer and home owner. Restrictions to social life were mentioned, as were the issues of welcoming any person into your own home. Some highlighted loneliness – occasionally recognising the suggestion in the text that this was not just an issue for the elderly. Many referenced help with the shopping as a bonus, alongside concerns of what might happen if the share proved unreliable. Occasional misunderstandings of the scheme – believing it involved buying a new house to share and/or allowed random strangers to prey on the vulnerable – were relatively unusual. Most gasped the general premise and were able to identify at least some basic pluses and minuses from each party's point of view. The best answers used the context of the first passage to understand the motivation for considering the scheme in the first place. Some picked up on family concerns, others on the likelihood that other support from any official care service was less likely in the climate described. Better answers considered from the start the purpose of writing and often decided beforehand their opinion of the scheme and how best to present their argument. The strongest answers were persuasive and addressed the concerns of their reader throughout. Mid-range answers listed disconnected advantages rather than built their case or presented a convincing overview. Many were aware of a need to link their ideas, though at times set phrases worked against the argument rather than with it. For example, 'Linking to my first point..' is only a useful start to a paragraph if it genuinely reflects a connection in the argument rather than simply opens another section of content.

Question 2

The best answers to **Question 2** attempted to draw their reader in to imagine looking at the photograph, evoking memories of the time it was taken through the inclusion of often small, pertinent details precisely described. A number of answers to this same task needed to find a way to move more naturally and smoothly between recalled memories and the photograph in the present, avoiding slips of control – particularly of tense. Responses needed to have been planned beforehand in terms of how the description would finish, perhaps back in the present, ending for effect rather than giving the impression of having stopped once the answer was approaching 250 words. The most successful answers managed to create the sense of a 'real' photo with 'real' people in it and kept that picture in mind throughout. A number of learners imbued their writing with some sense of how things had changed since the photo had been taken. They might often have taken this motif of contrast between past and present still further. There were some inventive variations on the recollections of people no longer in their lives – older relatives unsurprisingly perhaps came to mind for a number of writers, along with a now married man at his mother's house discovering a picture of him with his childhood friend. There was even a school photograph of a once-feared bully. A number of potentially excellent ideas were not fully exploited and learners may well benefit from considering examples of such mid-range answers in class discussion in order to highlight where opportunities were missed.

Question 3

Though sufficiently open to allow for a variety of approaches, focus on the task is essential. Those answers to **Question 3** that had clearly positioned themselves to observe from above were often able to offer some interesting images, at times sequenced helpfully to draw the reader into the scene. Some candidates drew on their knowledge of landmarks to offer descriptions of famous sights, for example Snowdon in Wales or The Shard in London. In those instances, the best did not rely on their readers' knowledge of the place in question to imagine the scene but developed descriptive detail instead and created their own picture. Some scenes chosen were less well focused on the specifics of the task. For example, a view of a carnival or fair has the potential to be relevant – perhaps from the top of a Ferris wheel which then descends back into the noise and excitement, or even from high up on an elephant or horse – but where the premise of being viewed from above is ignored altogether that opportunity to offer an original overall picture is lost. Those who chose to set their description within the confines of a

narrative moment needed on occasion to consider more fully how to build and refine a sense of atmosphere through the balancing of perspectives and crafting of detail rather than through event.

Question 4 and Question 5

Those selecting narrative tasks in **Question 4** and **Question 5** responded with some apparent enthusiasm to the open nature of the titles – recognising the titles allowed for a wide variety of relevant responses. Answers demonstrated an impressive range of ideas and plots with generally competent overall structure. Occasionally, narratives were a little over-ambitious given the limits of timed conditions and in attempting to cover too much ground became less convincing as a result.

Opportunities to create suspense and atmosphere were sometimes missed. During planning stages, there was perhaps a requirement to be more selective and consider how much information an audience might need, or want, to engage with the tale. It was encouraging to see that many candidates drew on their experience as readers to create narratives in a given genre or style – some to very good effect. There was evidence that they had planned the content/action of their narratives, though not always considered the balance of the constituent parts or paid sufficient attention to other elements such as characterisation and/or setting. Some topics chosen were particularly challenging and perhaps difficult to relate convincingly as a result. Most though, demonstrated an awareness of audience, opened with an attempt to hook their reader and often deliberately included an ending designed as a cliff-hanger. Few over-used dialogue, most attempted to vary sentence structure and paid at least some attention to punctuation, and many were largely accurate in terms of spelling and grammar.

More detailed information about this syllabus can be found at www.cie.org.uk and <http://teachers.cie.org.uk>

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