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Introduction

The texts about music were accessible across the full range of abilities and examiners commented that candidates were able to engage with the tasks and respond appropriately.

There was evidence of some good teaching and learning in preparation for this examination in the responses seen and some candidates seemed well prepared on the whole. However examiners did comment that a significant number of responses to Question 3 and Question 6 did not focus on the writers' techniques and their intended effects, instead describing the content of the texts. While examiners saw some good responses across all the questions, several examiners commented that there were fewer higher level responses than in previous series, despite the accessibility of the texts.

Successful candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and their responses sometimes demonstrated exploration and analysis. Their writing responses were engaging and effective. They were well controlled and accurate.

Less successful candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often brief or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

There were some candidates who made references to the pictures in their responses to Question 3, 6 and 7. This is not a valid way to respond to texts as the pictures are not language or structural devices chosen for effect by the writers. A small number of candidates did not attempt Question 7, suggesting that they may have had problems with timing.

There were a few candidates who copied out all, or considerable parts, of the extracts in response to Question 8. This is not a successful way to respond as candidates are required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

There was some evidence of planning and proofreading which is to be encouraged. Some examiners commented that candidates did not always plan responses to Sections B and C and plans might have benefitted them. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

There were some responses to Questions 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9 in particular, that had evidence of learned templates and inappropriately sophisticated and unhelpful vocabulary. Centres should not encourage candidates to regurgitate learned templates or responses

because this approach does not allow candidates to demonstrate their own skills and will limit their achievement.

Section A (Questions 1-7)

This consists of two short retrieval questions and a question on the writer's use of language and structure to create effects on each text and a question requiring candidates to compare the two texts.

Question 1

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates responded correctly identifying times such as: 'when she's upset', 'sitting at her desk' and 'doing her make-up'.

Rare incorrect responses referred to "I turn to my playlists on Spotify", which did not answer the question, or incorrectly identified 'Prior to the Covid pandemic.' Occasionally candidates offered responses from outside the line references.

Candidates must ensure they read the text and the question carefully, ensuring they select material from the correct section of the text.

Question 2

This is a straightforward question on Text One which does not require candidates to use their own words.

The majority of candidates responded with correct examples of points the writer makes about her collection of songs, most commonly: 'they can unlock a hidden compartment of emotions and memories', 'they provide memories of riding on the bus', or 'they provide memories of summer camp'.

Occasionally candidates misunderstood the question and answered with the names of some of the songs that she listened to. A few candidates did not use the correct line references

Candidates must ensure they read the question and the text carefully, ensuring they select material from the correct section of the text.

Question 3

This question requires the candidate to explore how the writer uses language and structure to present her ideas about music.

Examiners commented that they did not see many higher level responses.

Most candidates demonstrated some understanding of the text and some of the techniques employed by the writer. They were able to identify features such as the use of first person, direct address, metaphors e.g. 'hurt rippling' and the use of expert evidence. They used mostly appropriate examples to support their points but a significant number of candidates did not clearly explain how these features helped the writer to present her ideas about music. The explanations sometimes consisted of simply giving generalised statements such as: 'this adds credibility or 'this connected to the reader' (but not how) or 'this was very engaging to the reader' but with no explanation of how it was engaging. Some candidates used very lengthy quotations.

Some examiners commented that many candidates were responding to what the writer said about music and not how she said it. Others observed that a lot of candidates concentrated on explaining why the writer liked music and what she said about it, responding to the content rather than the techniques employed by the writer.

Successful candidates were able to explore and analyse the writer's techniques and explain how these techniques affected the reader and use appropriate references to support their points. They analysed the use of language such as the use of the rhetorical question in the title, adjectives, description, listing and anecdotes, backed up by textual support and analysis of effects. These candidates were able to develop points and show understanding of language through focusing on the effects of specific words and phrases e.g. 'profound power' (alliteration) and the listing of 'heal, bond, share'. They were able to use correct terminology to identify language features e.g. 'unlock a hidden compartment' (metaphor).

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content based and lacked focus on the writer's techniques. They wrote about 'what' the writer said rather than 'how' she presented her ideas about music.

There was also evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular techniques used by the writer but do not link them to the writer's ideas about music or explain their effectiveness. Less successful responses contained lots of quotations from the text, often quite lengthy, which were left unexplained. Expressions were used such as 'she explained', 'she presented', 'she lists', but these were followed up by references to content, not to 'how' the writer achieved effects. Some less successful candidates re-told the text. Some did use quotations but these were used to support a narrative response, essentially explaining the content of the text. The weakest responses were simply summaries or direct copies of the text.

Centres need to remind candidates that this question asks **how** the writer achieves his/her effects not **what** he/she says.

Question 4

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates responded successfully.

The most common correct responses were: 'it improves focus', 'it improves concentration' and 'it improves productivity'. Candidates often included all three of these in their response. The common incorrect response was using only part of bullet point 5: 'It creates association between good work habits' without finishing the sentence so the response was not complete and did not answer the question.

Centres need to make sure that candidates read the question carefully, select complete points and select their points from the correct part of the text.

Question 5

This is a straightforward question on Text Two which does not require candidates to use their own words.

Most candidates identified two correct points.

The common correct responses given were: 'choose music that stimulates without distracting', 'choose music that energises without engaging' and 'choose music that motivates without dominating'. However there were a few responses that lost a mark by making the same point twice e.g. 'instrumental music' and 'music with minimal lyrical content'.

A few candidates selected points from outside the line references.

Centres need to make sure that candidates read the question carefully and select their points from the correct part of the text.

Question 6

The question asks the candidate how the writer presents his ideas about listening to music whilst studying. Most examiners commented that candidates' performance on this question was similar to Question 3 but some examiners thought candidates found this text slightly easier to respond to whereas others thought it was not answered so successfully.

Most candidates were able to demonstrate some understanding of the writer's techniques and how these were used to present his ideas.

They were able to select appropriate features of the text to write about such as the use of expert opinions, subheadings and informal writing style, and make some relevant comments on the effects of these features. However all examiners commented on responses that did not focus on the language and structural techniques the writer used and the intended effects of these techniques.

More successful candidates were thorough and supported their points with appropriate quotations, whilst exploring the effects on the reader.

They explored how language and structural devices were used to present the writer's ideas. They supported their points with appropriate and detailed references. They commented on the informal tone of the piece, the use of direct address, the references to experts and research and the humour and considered the effects of these features. They often commented on the impact of the two short sentences at the start and the use of humour in 'weapons of mass distraction' and 'brooding super-villain'.

Less successful candidates produced responses that were content-based and lacked focus on the writer's techniques. They wrote about 'what' the writer said rather than 'how' he presented his ideas. Expressions were used such as 'he explained', 'he presented', 'he lists', but these were followed up by references to content, not to 'how' the writer achieved effects.

Less successful responses often identified a small range of features supported with lengthy quotations and simple comments. There was evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them. Weaker candidates tended to re-tell the content. The weakest candidates simply copied out all or sections of the text with no comments of their own.

As with Question 3, centres need to remind candidates that this question asks **how** the writer achieves his/her effects not **what** he/she says.

Question 7

This question requires candidates to compare how the writers convey their ideas and perspectives about listening to music.

Examiners noted that they did not see many higher level responses to this question but the majority of candidates were able to identify and discuss basic comparisons and a few produced well-thought out comparisons of the extracts. A number of examiners commented that candidates did not support their comparisons with relevant textual references.

Many responses did discuss both texts throughout their responses, rather than discussing each text individually and then putting a brief comparative comment at the end. However some candidates are still writing about each text individually and then writing a comparative comment at the end. These comparisons were often not supported. Examiners commented that these responses were not as successful as those candidates whose responses were comparative throughout.

Most candidates were able to identify some relevant comparisons and use some valid references from the texts as support but they did not always develop their responses sufficiently. Comparative points that were made covered the different purposes of the texts (persuasive and advisory). They also compared features of the texts such as the different forms (a blog and an article), the structure of the texts (the use of sub-headings in Text Two), the use of experts and also that one text is focused on listening to music in general, whereas the other is focused on listening to music whilst studying. Most candidates identified that both texts made positive points about music.

More successful responses were able to make a wide range of comparisons with clear exploration of the writers' ideas and perspectives. These candidates were able to use references which were balanced across both texts and supported the points being made. They were able to structure their responses comparatively by taking the various features of the texts and comparing and contrasting them throughout. This allowed a much better standard of comparative answer and made it more likely that they would move beyond obvious comparisons. They were able to focus on the methods used by both writers, with many considering the use of inclusive language, direct address, the use of informal or colloquial language, tone and humour. However some examiners commented that not many responses showed analysis in their comparisons of the ideas and perspectives.

Less successful candidates either did not compare or made few limited comparative comments. They wrote about one text and then the other without making comparisons or had a brief comparison at the beginning or end of their response. Sometimes the texts were only linked by a single phrase, e.g. 'Whereas in Text Two...' or candidates identified a feature in one text and simply commented that the other text did not have this particular feature. These responses lacked supporting references and only made obvious comparisons about content. The weakest simply summarised the texts or parts of them with no comparisons at all. There were examples of candidates using lists of comparisons, sometimes presented as bullet point lists, with no real explanation or expansion of ideas.

Some responses were very brief for a 15 mark question. There were also a number of blank responses. These issues may suggest problems with timing.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts. This should include how to analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve their effects and how to write comparative responses. Candidates should also be reminded that they should provide relevant textual support for their points but lengthy quotations are to be avoided.

Section B (Question 8)

There was evidence of some good teaching and learning in some of the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet. Examiners commented that candidates who planned their responses seemed to respond in a more focused manner.

Examiners commented that most candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a letter to a friend. The most successful responses had a good sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches, humour and rhetorical questions to engage the audience.

AO1

The majority of candidates used the bullet points provided in the question to provide the content of their letter and some candidates were able to make appropriate use of their own experiences as music lovers to develop their points. Candidates often blended the bullet points together, but there was usually some evidence for each of the bullet points.

Most candidates were able to select and interpret the relevant information from both texts and were able to include details from all three bullet points. Some examiners noted that the bullet points were generally covered evenly although other examiners commented that the first and second bullet points were often covered in the most detail. Some candidates struggled with differentiating between 'reasons for listening to music' and 'effects of listening to music' so their coverage of the last two bullet point was a little more limited. A few examiners thought that the first bullet point was the one which was the most thinly addressed.

More successful candidates used a wide range of appropriate points of information from both texts, supported with perceptive comments. They covered all the bullet points in detail, selecting the most relevant points from the texts and developing their ideas. They effortlessly incorporated the three bullets without it sounding contrived and were able to use all three bullet points, taking ideas from the texts and extending and

personalising these, to produce a convincing and persuasive letter. A few used their own ideas very successfully e.g. they discussed specific songs which reminded them of their friendship.

Less successful candidates were sometimes able to select and interpret a small number of relevant points but their responses were often short and therefore did not include many details. They sometimes strayed away from the bullet points, with the candidates getting carried away with friendly banter or family detail. Examiners commented that there were some candidates who lifted information from the texts or who used very close re-wording. A few unsuccessful responses simply copied out the texts.

AO4

Most candidates were able to adapt the material for the audience and purpose. Most responses were able to communicate clearly with their audience and were able to write in an appropriate style for an informal letter to a friend and made use of features like direct address, humour and rhetorical questions to create a convincingly chatty and persuasive tone. Most responses were generally clear and appropriate, even if some candidates felt that the form was slightly outdated ('I cannot believe I am writing a letter...'). However some examiners commented that a few responses that communicated clearly were too formal for a letter to a friend and sometimes appeared to be essays.

More successful candidates were able to create a lively and engaging style that suggested they had a well-developed understanding of the required approach. These responses constantly reminded the reader that this is a letter to a friend by addressing their friend throughout the letter. They were able to create a lively, friendly tone by incorporating the benefits of music into some personal experiences, e.g. 'remember that time when we ... music really helped relax us'. Their register was sustained throughout their responses and they retained their focus on persuading the friend why they should follow their advice.

Less successful candidates communicated at a basic level and had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response. They sometimes opened with a 'Dear...' but then did very little to suggest that this was a letter to a friend. Some candidates did not convey any sense that this was supposed to be a letter to a friend, writing in a style that resembled a speech, a letter, an article or an essay.

AO5

There were some examples of successful responses with good levels of accuracy.

Most candidates were able to use their spelling, punctuation and grammar to make their meaning reasonably clear. They were able to produce a structured response with some range of vocabulary and sentence structure. Most employed some paragraphing, sometimes using the given bullet points to help them. However examiners commented that expression, grammar and punctuation were not always secure.

More successful candidates used a varied range of correctly spelt vocabulary and a range of appropriate punctuation. They used a range of different sentence structures to help them create particular effects. These responses employed accurate paragraphing. There was often evidence of proofreading.

Less successful candidates sometimes struggled to communicate their ideas and their language controls were not always secure, especially grammar. Some examiners commented that less successful candidates had problems with grammar and expression, despite good spelling and punctuation. Other examiners noted that punctuation was an issue with candidates writing long, one sentence paragraphs or using very little sentence punctuation.

Common errors commented on by examiners were: missing basic sentence punctuation; the use of very long, unstructured sentences ; comma splicing; missing or misused apostrophes; problems with homophones; misspelling of basic vocabulary; not capitalising 'I' for the personal pronoun; missing capital letters at the beginning of sentences as well as random capital letters within sentences; verb tenses and other grammatical errors.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately and accurately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)

Examiners commented, as always, on how much they enjoyed reading some of the responses in this section.

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section.

There was some evidence of planning which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Some examiners commented positively on evidence that candidates had proofread their work but other examiners observed that candidates would have benefitted from proofreading their work more carefully.

Question 9

AO4

Some examiners commented positively on candidates' responses to this question and it was clear that some candidates who chose this question had been prepared to write in a persuasive and argumentative style. However other examiners thought that some candidates struggled to develop and sustain a response.

Candidates who chose this question appeared to understand the requirements of the task and attempted to present an argument. A number of candidates wrote about the differences between challenges we choose to undertake and challenging situations or life events that are thrust upon us. A wide range of challenges were considered – many of them personal e.g. coping with bullying, standing up for others and a number of responses that included anecdotal examples relating to the pandemic and/or challenges that the candidate had been through. Other examples were used e.g. dangerous sports, losing weight, getting fit, passing an examination or learning a skill. Sometimes these were too personal and not discursive, sounding more like a narrative. Some candidates read 'challenges' as problems and stated that these were not interesting, but inevitable.

More successful responses tended to employ a range of rhetorical devices to persuade their reader of their point of view. These candidates had often been well prepared for this type of task and included sentence starters such as: 'On the one hand...', 'Whilst', 'Conversely', 'For example', suggesting that they had a good understanding of what they were being asked to do. Some referred to role models in their arguments e.g. Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, or interesting scenarios e.g. Escape Rooms. They generally agreed with the statement presenting a wide range of arguments in favour which could be both subtle and sophisticated. Challenges were varied and creative: physical and mental. Some of their responses took a broader view and looked at the positives and negatives of challenges and came to a balanced judgement.

Less successful candidates had problems with both maintaining a clear argument and structuring their responses. They made some attempt to address the statement but these responses were often unstructured, narrative or tended to present ideas as a personal account rather than a discursive piece of writing. These candidates sometimes struggled to find enough ideas and their responses became repetitive or were brief.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop and sustain their ideas effectively.

Question 10

Question 10 was the most popular question.

AO4

Some examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'The Turning Point'.

There was a wide variety of interpretations for this response with candidates writing about both physical and emotional turning points. Some candidates included a moral or ethical component in their stories about the importance of doing the right thing. Many wrote about doing well in exams, which signified the turning point; others used a tragic event to determine the turning point in their stories or moments of adversity which had transformed their lives. A number of candidates successfully used personal experiences to inform their narrative. There were some darker stories where candidates imagined characters taking the 'wrong path' or missing the 'turning point' and the consequences that subsequently unfolded.

Most candidates were able to communicate with some clarity, with an appropriate sense of purpose and some apt use of form, tone and register. They were able to develop their narrative successfully with an appropriate tone and some character development. These candidates made a real attempt at crafting a story and it was clear that they had been prepared for the requirements of this task. Many responses had a sense of development with clear beginnings, middles and ends. There were attempts to include dialogue, character and setting description, flashbacks and other devices to make their writing engaging. Occasionally candidates were over-ambitious, producing extremely long responses with complicated plotlines. Often candidates chose to reveal the turning point at the end of their writing and, whilst in some cases this appeared to be deliberate, examiners commented that sometimes it seemed to be an afterthought.

More successful candidates were able to write well-crafted stories which were often lively and entertaining. They were not over-adventurous but were written with clarity and a sense of purpose. These candidates were able to produce a compelling, sharply focused narrative. Responses had fewer, well-developed characters and a well-thought-out plot, designed to entertain. The best responses were tightly plotted and covered a limited timescale.

Less successful candidates lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative or tended to write simplistic narratives without any great awareness of form, tone and register. They struggled with clarity, with over-complicated or muddled storylines and weak endings that were not closely related to the events that had unfolded. They used plots from films and computer games which were barely adapted

for purpose e.g. *The Matrix* and *Breaking Bad* both featured more than once. Their responses were often lengthy with repetitive and unfocused plot ideas.

Examiners commented that candidates were rarely well-served by writing very long responses.

Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response without relying on plots from other sources.

Question 11

AO4

Some candidates produced well-written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing a celebration, festival or event which featured music. There were descriptions of school events, birthday parties, music festivals or concerts and religious festivals.

Most candidates were able to express and order information and describe some of their experiences of a musical event. Some examiners commented that there was good use of the senses in describing the sights, sounds and smells of a music festival. Others observed that the music element to this task was just added in at the end in some responses and some forgot to mention the music element at all.

More successful candidates were able to weave in a range of sights, sounds, thoughts and feelings and, in some cases, created a really strong sense of what this experience had been like for them, using points of view that ranged from being in the moment to reflecting and looking back on that experience. These responses often remained fully focused on the music and demonstrated an impressive range of descriptive writing.

Some examiners commented that there was a tendency to narrative responses to this descriptive task.

Less successful responses were often pedestrian, undeveloped or unclear. These responses often drifted into narrative or showed a limited descriptive ability. Often too much time was wasted on the build up to the festival or event e.g. acquiring tickets, transport and practical details surrounding the event. Clarity was often an issue with these responses. This limited their achievement.

Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

AO5 Comments across Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)

(The comments for AO5 on Section C are similar to the comments on AO5 for Section B).

Most candidates were able to express and order information and ideas with some correctly spelt vocabulary, some control of punctuation and some accurate paragraphing. Most candidates were able to communicate successfully even if there were errors.

More successful responses were accurate, using a wider range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary. They were able to shape their writing, using an increasingly wide vocabulary, with spelling invariably correct and punctuation used for effect. The very best offered cohesion, an increasingly complex vocabulary and the use of punctuation to craft their responses.

Less successful candidates had difficulty communicating clearly. Less successful responses often did not paragraph at all and used basic sentence structures which became quite repetitive. These candidates had numerous errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

There was some evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on the number of candidates who had problems with grammar and expression such as problems with tenses and sentence structure, including missing words. Some examiners also commented on the use of over-ambitious vocabulary which was not effective or appropriate. Some examiners noted that the use of paragraphing was an issue for some candidates. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication.

Common errors commented on by examiners were: missing basic sentence punctuation; comma splicing; missing or misused apostrophes; problems with homophones; misspelling of basic vocabulary; not capitalising 'I' for the personal pronoun; missing capital letters at the beginning of sentences as well as random capital letters within sentences; grammatical errors such as problems with sentence structures; subject-verb agreement and verb tenses.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and punctuation to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- were able to explore language and structure and show how these are used by writers to achieve effects in response to Questions 3 and 6
- were able to select a wide range of comparisons and explore the writers' ideas and perspectives in response to Question 7
- were able to select and adapt relevant information from the texts for Question 8
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- used ambitious vocabulary appropriately
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to identify language and structure or made little comment on how these are used by writers to achieve effects in response to Questions 3 and 6
- were not able to compare the texts or offered very limited comparisons in response to Question 7
- sometimes narrated the texts in response to Questions 3, 6 and 7
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 8
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 8
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 8
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

