



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

The texts about learning new skills 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 or re-telling 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 demonstrated exploration and sometimes 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 the 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 some 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 9 in particular, that had evidence of learned templates and inappropriately sophisticated and unhelpful vocabulary. There was also some evidence of learned responses being used in response to Question 10. Centres should not encourage candidates to use 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, 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 skills such as: 'speak Spanish', 'make fresh pasta' and 'learn to bake'.

Rare incorrect responses referred to 'learn a new skill' or 'learn a different skill', which did not answer the question. 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 how to use time well, most commonly: 'identify the things you spend time doing that aren't of much value', 'use the time towards honing your new skill', or 'you can make progress in a short amount of time'. Wasting time on Instagram and Netflix were also popular points.

Some candidates wrote more than was needed, making several points in one which was unnecessary for a one mark question.

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 advice about learning a new skill.

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 and explain features such as the use of sub-headings, questions, listing, direct address and colloquial language. 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 advice about learning a new skill. The explanations sometimes consisted of simply giving generalised statements such as: 'this makes the reader want to read more', or 'this makes the article more relatable to readers' (but not how) or 'this engages the reader' but with no explanation of how it was engaging. A lot of candidates referred to the use of sub-headings although only a few made a thorough exploration of the effect. Most tended to quote one of the sub-headings and comment on how it made the text easier to read. Quite a few responses referred to the sub-headings but did not quote them.

More successful candidates were able to show a thorough understanding and exploration of language and structure. A good range of points was selected and detailed references were offered supporting the points being made. They showed a thorough understanding of linguistic features and could explain how Anderson had used structural and persuasive features to advise the reader. These candidates were able to explore the techniques used, looking at how word choice (and connotations) impacted meaning. They commented on the use of questions, direct address, sub-headings, listing, tricolon, repetition and the reassuring and positive tone throughout. However examiners commented that although the majority of these responses were thorough, they did not offer analysis or perception.

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 advice about learning a new skill. There was evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates (correctly) identify particular techniques used by the writer but do not link them to the writer's advice about learning a new skill or explain their effectiveness. There were often simple lists of techniques spotted and a quotation to support with no further explanation. 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.

Examiners commented that many candidates were responding to what the writer said about learning new skills and not how she said it. Others observed that a surprising number of candidates summarised or paraphrased the text, which therefore detracted from their overall mark.

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: 'inadequate facilities', 'lack of affordable instruction' and 'bad childhood experiences'. There were a few candidates who used their own words in response to this question.

An incorrect response was: 'bad childhood' which is not what the text said. Some candidates did not select material from the correct line references and gave incorrect responses such as: 'they don't enjoy the water' or 'they aren't interested in learning'.

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: 'limbs are out of control', 'legs churn in frantic spurts' and 'arms chop down on the water'. However there were a few responses that lost a mark by using the same bullet point as two separate points e.g. 'forgetting to move arms' and 'forgetting to move legs'. 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 learning to swim as an adult. 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.

Examiners reported that most candidates were able to understand Jay Willis's text about learning to swim as an adult and some responded effectively to at least some of the ideas expressed. 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 anecdotal style/personal account, the use of repetition, negative language and references and statistics, 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. There were a lot of generic comments such as 'this engages the reader', 'this makes the reader want to read more', 'this makes the article more relatable to readers' with no further explanation of how these effects are achieved.

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 features like the use of humour, hyperbole and the personification of the pool as his 'nemesis'. There were also astute points about the contrast between Willis's attitude to swimming at the beginning and end of the passage. Some candidates were able to explore the humour in the parenthesis '(The swimming lessons, not my parents.)' and the amusing simile of the panicked trout.

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 explains', 'he describes', but these were followed up by references to content, not to 'how' the writer achieved effects. Some identified a small range of features and supported them with lengthy quotations and made limited comments. There was evidence of 'feature spotting' where candidates identify (correctly) particular language features but do not explain them. Some 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 learning a new skill.

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. Some examiners noted that it was pleasing to see evidence of planning in the responses to this question.

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 developed or 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 made were: that Text One is advisory whereas Text Two is a personal account; Text One is positive whereas Text Two shows some negativity; Text One mentions several skills whereas Text Two only mentions one; the possible intended audience for each text – young people for Text One and adults for Text Two.

More successful responses were able to make a wide range of comparisons with some 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 examine the similarities and differences and what these showed about the writers' viewpoints. They structured their responses comparatively by taking the various features of the texts and comparing and contrasting them throughout. Some focused on features such as 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, eg '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.

Examiners commented that a number of responses to this question followed the format of the indicative content in the mark scheme which is not intended to provide a model for a candidate response. Some examiners also saw responses that appeared to be responding as if this was a question on a legacy paper – they expressed a preference for one text in comparison to the other, which is not what this question asks them to do. Some candidates compared the use of images in the two texts – this is not a valid comparison as the images are not selected by the writers.

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 an article for young adults. The most successful responses had a good sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches, humour and rhetorical questions to engage the audience.

All examiners commented that there was quite a lot of evidence of direct lifting from the texts which limited achievement. It was felt to be more prevalent than in previous series.

AO1

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 with different hobbies including the examples from the text as well as more personal ones. Some examiners commented that there were limited references to Text Two which affected the coverage of the bullet points (especially the third bullet point) as ideas from Text Two were not incorporated. 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 were able to successfully re-work both texts and personalised their responses, looking at skills they themselves had learnt. A number of responses included some imaginative activities to develop the first bullet point such as driving, chess, scuba diving, flying a plane, martial arts, parkour, dancing, playing an instrument, snowboarding and painting.

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. Some less successful responses lifted information from the texts or used very close re-wording. Unsuccessful responses simply copied out the texts.

A04

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 written in an appropriate style for an article for young adults. They made use of features like direct address, humour and rhetorical questions to create a convincingly chatty and persuasive tone.

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 were able to engage the audience with a range of persuasive techniques, as well as relate directly to the young adult audience, for example commenting on 'teen issues' like 'nagging parents' or 'revising for exams'. They tended to be humorous, informal and friendly, with perceptive use of techniques and strategies to hook the prospective reader.

Less successful candidates communicated at a basic level and had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response. Some candidates lost the focus on writing an article and lost sight of audience. Less successful candidate relied too heavily on the extracts, often using direct lifts from the texts which impacted their achievement. They often had issues with clarity as they had weak writing skills and this impeded their ability to communicate clearly.

A05

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 (Question 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.

One examiner noted that a number of responses displayed evidence of word counting including a marginal running total and some candidates appeared to have gone back over what they had written and crossed out entire paragraphs to reduce their word count. The word count is advisory and responses are assessed on their merits, not on the number of words.

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

A04

Examiners saw a relatively small number of responses to this question. Some examiners commented positively on some of the responses 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.

Most candidates who chose this question appeared to understand the requirements of the task and attempted to present an argument. They engaged reasonably well with the subject of 'never being too old to try something new'. It was interpreted widely. At one end of the spectrum, there was a response saying that being over 50 was far too old to learn new skills, because people of that age can't think properly and are too weak – to the other end of the spectrum where there was mention of 80-year-old skydivers amongst other examples. There was an acknowledgement that physically our bodies age and our concentration and memory may suffer but if the willingness to learn was there an individual should try. References were made to older people finding it more difficult to learn to drive and learn a new language and candidates were often vague as to what constituted old.

There was evidence of scaffolded essays with prepared phrases which were repeated by several candidates eg quotations at the beginning such as: 'I do not pretend to know everything, I only speak on matters I know I will win'. Structural phrases were also evident eg 'Once we have embraced a stand point we must look at the whole picture' as well as the use of phrases like 'indubitably exigent'. It seemed that these candidates were more engaged in remembering the scaffolding than they were in developing their own ideas in response to the task.

More successful candidates were able to use persuasive techniques for great effect and tended to employ a range of rhetorical devices to persuade their reader of their point of view. They produced lively and well-thought-out responses about the positive side of learning as you get older. In a few

successful responses candidates made a strong case, often considering counter arguments and making a balanced conclusion.

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, with limited ideas and development, sometimes borrowed from the texts. 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. Candidates should not rely on scaffolding and learnt phrases but should be able to produce a personal response.

Question 10

Question 10 was the most popular question.

A04

Some examiners commented positively on the quality of some of the responses to the title 'The Short Cut'.

Some examiners noted that there seemed to be more evidence of pre-learned responses adapted to 'fit' the question, often unsuccessfully. Centres should encourage candidates to develop personal responses to writing tasks and not to rely on memorising a response which may or may not be appropriate for the title.

Most responses interpreted 'The Short Cut' to refer to a quick way, along which some danger or unpredictable situation presented itself. Common themes included taking a potentially dangerous or risky route home and regretting it, cheating in exams, and taking part in races and other sporting competitions. Some candidates interpreted the title more imaginatively to refer, for example, to taking a short cut to riches, a haircut or baking a cake too quickly. Some short cuts were rather flimsy or tenuous eg ordering a takeaway instead of cooking. Some of the narratives ended tragically in that characters were murdered or disappeared because in their desperation, they had listened to others and taken the short cut and then were kidnapped/killed. The majority of candidates saw the short cut as a positive initially but there were very few examples where the outcome was positive. 'The Short Cut' often featured at the end of the story and involved someone whose life had been 'turned around' by an event, real or imaginary. A

number of candidates successfully used personal experiences to inform their narrative.

Most candidates were able to communicate with some clarity, with an appropriate sense of purpose and some appropriate use of form, tone and register. They were able to develop their narrative successfully with an appropriate tone and some character development. Many responses had a sense of development with clear beginnings, middles and ends. There were attempts to include dialogue, character and setting description and other devices to make the writing engaging. Occasionally candidates were over-ambitious, producing extremely long responses with complicated plot-lines. Often candidates chose to reveal the short cut 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 coherent, well-crafted narratives which were engaging. They were not over-adventurous but were written with clarity and a sense of purpose. Some candidates were able to produce compelling and imaginative narratives well-focused on the title and were able to build a sense of character and place to great effect. 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. They struggled to produce a clear narrative and their stories were never more than broadly appropriate. They often had over-complicated or muddled storylines and weak endings that were not closely related to the events that had unfolded. Their responses were often lengthy with repetitive and unfocused plot ideas.

Examiners commented that candidates seldom benefit from 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

A04

Some candidates produced well-written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing an inspirational place. There were descriptions of specific regions in countries, cities, houses (of close relatives), bedrooms, beaches, universities, schools, a bookshop, mosques, gardens and gyms and sports centres. One examiner commented that this question gave, as ever, a real insight into the lives of candidates across the world and it is a

privilege to read some of their accounts. Some examiners commented that there was a tendency to write narrative responses to this descriptive task.

Most candidates were able to express and order information and describe some aspects of a place that inspired them. Most responses focused at least partially on description of a place although examiners commented that some responses were too narrative, with pockets of description. Some were very descriptive but not of the inspirational place, and the idea of inspiration was often added as an apparent afterthought. Some descriptions were more focused on events that were inspiring rather than the place itself and a number focused on an inspiring person associated with a particular place. These responses sometimes lost the focus of describing an inspirational place.

More successful candidates were able to maintain a clear focus on the place that was inspirational. They focused on a known/real place, effectively describing visual and auditory experiences eg the candidate's grandparents' village outside a city in Myanmar: there was a real sense of reality and authenticity because it was not made up or imaginary. They were able to write with flair and enthusiasm, with effective uses of imagery, creating effective mood and atmosphere. There were some effective literary devices used such as alliteration, figurative language and varied sentence structures. One examiner commented that an engaging description of rural France made him wish he was there.

Less successful responses were often pedestrian, undeveloped or unclear. These responses often drifted into narrative or showed a limited descriptive ability. Some wrote a short, factual account of a place with very few descriptive features. 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.

A05 Comments across Section C (Questions 9, 10 and 11)

(The comments for A05 on Section C are similar to the comments on A05 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 mostly correct spelling 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. 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. Candidates should be encouraged to proofread their responses.

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 or copied 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.

