

## Candidates' Performance

### Paper 1

Paper 1 tests candidates' reading skills, and consists of three parts: Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. Candidates have 1.5 hours to complete Part A, which is compulsory, and either Part B1 (consisting of items of a lower level of difficulty than Part A) or Part B2 (consisting of items of a higher level of difficulty than Part A). The weighting for Part A and Part B is 50% per part. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 1 was 48,025. A total of 20,496 candidates chose to do Part B1 (about 42.7%) while 27,529 (about 57.3%) chose to do Part B2. Candidates who attempt Parts A and B2 are able to attain the full range of levels, while Level 4 is the highest level attainable for candidates who attempt Parts A and B1.

### Overall Results

A statistical analysis of Paper 1 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Paper 1 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Part A	42	53.6	24.7
Part B1	42	51.6	21.1
Part B2	42	51.8	18.6

### Part A (Compulsory section)

Part A was an article about the restoration of Tai Kwun, the former Victoria Prison and Central Police Station. The text gave an account of major incidents which happened during the renovation project and how the new design was perceived by local people and stakeholders in the community. A range of items such as cloze passage, table completion and proof-reading were included. Candidates were also required to identify and match characters and their views towards this project.

The items in Part A answered correctly by the highest numbers of candidates were Q.1i-iii, Q.4, Q.5, Q.6iii and Q.8, with at least 70% of candidates answering these correctly. These represented a range of questions asking for relatively simple factual information to be identified, or for simple vocabulary to be analysed or identified. These items suggested candidates possessed a good range of basic but important skills in reading in English. Indeed, in this first half of Part A, most items were answered correctly by at least 50% of candidates, suggesting solid reading skills.

A large number of candidates did not follow the instructions in Q.14. In this proofreading task, candidates had to underline a word that needed to be replaced in a line of summary, and suggest a correct replacement next to it, while putting a single tick next to the line that did not need any correction. Many candidates put more than one tick, meaning that the lines were marked as incorrect. Candidates seemed overly focused on finding and replacing words with clear 'opposite' meanings, which led to strange replacement sentences (e.g. replacing 'ordinary' with 'famous' in line iii, making the sentence '*...it told the stories of both famous and more famous people*', which makes very little sense). Fewer than half of the candidates got items i and ii correct. Items iii and iv were among the hardest for candidates (with only 30% and 6% correct, respectively). However markers rated this as one of the most successful items since it tested paragraph-level understanding of meaning.

Fewer than half of candidates answered Q.13 correctly, illustrating two other problems, over-copying and lack of response to grammatical context in questions. This was a sentence-completion task, and candidates should immediately have been aware of the grammar and context clues in the parts of the sentence provided. The sentence needing completion starts with 'As Central lacks...'. A common

incorrect answer was to copy a chunk straight from the text to complete this sentence, which is unlikely to be a successful strategy in this question type. Other candidates attempted to manipulate the information from several places in the paragraph, for example, writing 'open spaces for people meeting up with their friends'. While this synthesis of ideas is a better strategy, this represents an incomplete idea, with candidates perhaps missing the grammatical cue. This can be identified as the beginning of a dependent clause, needing both an end to that clause ('As Central lacks open spaces...') and a following independent clause to anchor it ('... Tai Kwun will become somewhere that friends will drop by in the evening') to illustrate cause and effect and successfully answer the question. Just over 50% of candidates answered this item correctly, which discriminated between stronger and weaker candidates.

Questions 4, 11 and 17 all required short answers of one word or phrase copied straight from the text. Candidates are typically required to write answers to these question types with no grammar or spelling mistakes, indicating their definite understanding of these answers; however markers reported seeing spelling mistakes more often than normal in these items, leading to a loss of marks. Candidates must remember to copy these single word/phrase answers as carefully as possible.

Q.19 had some of the most difficult items, with around two-thirds of candidates incorrectly matching the people/organisations with comments illustrating their standpoints. Parts ii and iv were especially challenging, answered correctly by only 11% and 28% respectively. This item tested holistic understanding of the text, as well as understanding of paraphrased ideas and stances, an important feature which stronger candidates handled well.

#### Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 comprised two reading passages linked by the theme of kite flying. The first passage was a how-to guide about kite flying taken from a website. It was written in the first person, with factual information. The discourse was considered to be accessible for most readers. The second text was an article introducing kite flying in Hong Kong. In this text the writer recorded the reminiscences of several characters and the decline of kite-flying culture, and what they do to promote kite flying in Hong Kong. Candidates were required to identify factual information in a range of item types such as gap-fills, True/False/Not given, multiple choice and short responses.

Questions 20, 21ii-iii, 24i, 26, 29, 32, 33iii were all answered correctly by at least 70% of candidates. These items demanded a similar range of skills as the Part A items mentioned above, with the addition of higher-level skills such as simple inference (Q.26) and genre identification (Q.32). With simpler texts in this part, candidates were able to tackle an even wider range of item types successfully. Success in these items further strengthened the impression of a satisfactory level of fundamental reading skills amongst candidates.

Many candidates copied excessively for Questions 30, 34 and 37, leading to a loss of marks. Candidates should remember that large chunks of copied material are rarely likely to be judged as correct answers, and more likely indicate that a candidate is hedging their bets, or copying at random. As discussed above, with Q.34 and Q.37 being sentence-completion items, some kind of textual manipulation of ideas from the passage was required, not just straight copying. Q.34 in particular was over-copied, with candidates failing to link the 'fading culture' to the act of kite flying, leading to incomplete answers. This item was one of the hardest (answered correctly by just 8% of candidates) but identified those candidates who understood the text well. Questions 27iv and v, two more sentence-completion items, were also among the hardest items in Part B1, with only around 20% of candidates answering these correctly. This item type seems to have proven especially difficult for candidates.

Questions 22, 24, 28, 35 and 38 all required one-word answers, but many candidates wrote more than one word, which immediately rendered their answers incorrect. It is very important that candidates take the time to read the instructions to each question carefully, and follow them appropriately.

#### Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 comprised one text of two parts. The first part was an article written by Graham Norton, a TV host and comedian. In reflecting on his role as an 'agony uncle', Norton compared himself to a medical



doctor and used medical terms throughout the text to show his willingness to help solve readers' problems. He categorised different kinds of problems submitted by his readers, ranging from trivial to serious.

The second part contained letter exchanges between Norton and two of his readers, one of whom had more genuine problems than the other. Candidates were required to work out the metaphors used by the writer, and respond to a range of items including identifying the implied meaning of phrases and the conflicting ideas in the writer's responses, and completing a diagram.

Questions 45iii and 45v, (True/False/Not given), 51ii-iv, (paragraph summaries) and Q.53 (multiple choice asking about feelings) were all answered correctly by at least 70% of candidates, suggesting that candidates dealt well with higher-order skills when tested through structured questions.

As could be expected, many of the items candidates struggled with were testing inference and detailed understanding of Part B2's complex text: Questions 44, 48, 49, 50, 56 and 58 were all answered correctly by between 3% and 23% of candidates. These all required an understanding of the text at a paragraph level, with Q.56 needing an understanding of how two different parts of the text (the question and response letters) interacted. Questions 44, 48, 56 and 58 required interpreting the meaning behind Norton's words, which were layered with metaphor and inference, in keeping with a comedic writing style. Q.49 required candidates to understand two 'conflicting ideas', and how Norton dealt with them. Markers highlighted this item as an especially challenging one with only 6% of candidates answering it correctly, as they needed to both recognise and indicate that Norton's conflict came from the fact that the two ideas were not equally weighted (the librarian's romance was almost definitely doomed to failure, but might possibly work out well). Candidates commonly made the mistake of balancing these two ideas too evenly (e.g. 'the marriage might work, but it might not'), thus missing the complexity of the situation. A final point to make about Questions 44, 49, 50 and 56 is that there was a great deal of copying from the text in these items, often leading to a lack of logic in the answers. The complex ideas tested in all these items were at the heart of Part B2's text, and the questions successfully probed understanding of the very highest-order elements of the paper.

As in other parts of the paper, candidates doing Part B2 apparently missed instructions in the questions, thus losing marks in easily preventable ways. In Q.57i-iv (the only items in Part B2 with a word limit), which asked for concise summaries of Norton's advice in a letter, it was relatively common to find candidates writing more than four words in their answers, thus invalidating them.

Although correctly answered by 67% of candidates, Q.47 ('Who or what does 'they' (line 22) refer to?' – answer 'the librarian's friends') gave rise to many illogical answers which showed that contextual clues had been missed.

#### Recommendations

Candidates should read instructions carefully, such as ticking only one option in Q.14, and follow word limits. They should copy words carefully when answering items requiring a single word or phrase taken straight from the text, and avoid spelling mistakes. They also need to recognise when a question calls for a longer, more open answer, and avoid copying excessively (e.g. Q.13, Q.34, Q.44).

Candidates are also reminded to pay attention to grammatical prompts in answers, such as the beginning of sentence-completion tasks (e.g. Q.13, Q.34, Q.37); plurality (e.g. Q.39 – 'we' is referring to more than one party, or Q.49 – at least two 'conflicting ideas' need to be mentioned); the parts of speech required to fill in blanks (e.g. Q.12 or Q.27); or the structure of examples provided to give assistance in more complex questions (e.g. the sample in Q.14, or the imperative structure in Q.57).

In matching items such as Q.19 or Q.61, very few candidates appeared to 'chance' writing the same letter more than once next to different options. This has been a problem in previous years, and resulted in automatically having those answers scored as incorrect, so it is encouraging to see this faulty strategy being dropped.

As discussed above, candidates had mixed success with items requiring global understanding of paragraphs and texts as a whole, and it is pleasing to see candidates tackling these items confidently, as



this skill is a fundamental one when reading. There were a number of items testing this ability, and candidates better able to engage in this skill were well equipped for them.

## Paper 2

### Part A

Paper 2 Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates were asked to write a review for an online food guide, *Eat & Drink* after eating at Hong Kong's hottest new restaurant, Dim Sum One. Candidates could write about what they liked and what they did not like about the restaurant, and choose to comment on four suggested areas, which were food, service, dining environment and price. Candidates also indicated in the review whether they would recommend the restaurant. The target audience was the general public and those who might be attracted by the food or services of the restaurant. An informal and chatty style could be used to engage with the reader.

### General Comments

In general, candidates' performance was satisfactory as the task was straightforward and allowed candidates to draw on their everyday dining experiences. Very few scripts were off topic. High-end scripts showed good awareness of the audience by describing something unique or quirky about the restaurant. The majority of candidates included interesting details about the restaurant's food, decor and services. Most candidates were able to complete the task using an appropriate tone and style.

### Content

Most candidates were able to give an overview of their personal dining experience in Dim Sum One. Many of them named traditional Chinese dishes and some successfully pointed out the special features that made this restaurant stand out, such as the ingredients used, the interior design and the special theme created by the restaurant. Many candidates made use of their creativity and imagination to describe fusion foods, which made their writing more interesting. Not many pieces focused on the negative side of the restaurant experience and most struck a balance between positive and negative comments.

Quite a number of reviews included snapshots of candidates' experience when dining, such as their interaction with the staff, and made some criticisms or complaints. Some of these were insignificant or unjustified, however. Some candidates included suggestions for improvement. While these were sometimes helpful, giving suggestions was not a requirement of the task.

Stronger candidates tended to include vivid descriptions of different aspects of the restaurant and explain clearly which types of customers were targeted. Some also made use of humour, for example, giving punning titles to their reviews. Weaker scripts included very general descriptions and there was a lack of elaboration of ideas.

### Language

As an online food guide is usually informal and meant to be entertaining, formal rules of sentence construction are not always followed and it is common for reviewers to use creative linguistic means (such as figurative language) to add interest to their writing. Stronger candidates made use of a wide range of adjectives and adverbs to convey taste, touch, sound, smell and sight. Specific terms and vocabulary related to food and cooking were also used to make the writing livelier, and show familiarity with the topic. Candidates were able to use a range of tenses for different purposes, and use the first person and an individual voice to express their personal thoughts and feelings.

### Organisation

Most candidates made a good attempt to cover both the positive and negative sides of the restaurant experience in an organised manner. There was evidence that candidates had given some thought to how to structure their review, and many followed a 'general-particular' structure in which general statements

about the restaurant were made first and then supported with details about the food, service and other features. Stronger candidates had a clear focus in each paragraph and used a range of connectives to show contrast and reservation.

#### Part B

Paper 2 Part B comprises eight questions (Q.2-Q.9) based on the elective modules in the senior secondary English Language curriculum (S4-6). In this part of the examination, candidates were required to choose one question and write about 400 words.

A total of 47,864 candidates attempted Paper 2 Part B. As for Part A, answers were assessed in three domains: content, language and organisation. The mean score achieved is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Paper 2 Part B results

Question	Topic	Mean Score (out of 42)	Mean (%)	Popularity (%)
2	Popular Culture	22.3	53	22
3	Social Issues	23.4	56	22
4	Workplace Communication	19.6	47	13
5	Sports Communication	20.7	49	8
6	Debating	24.9	59	20
7	Poems and Songs	24.1	57	5
8	Short Stories	23.6	56	4
9	Drama	17.4	41	6

Questions 2 (Popular Culture), 3 (Social Issues) and 6 (Debating) were the three most popular questions, followed by Question 4 (Workplace Communication), which more than 10% of candidates attempted. The popularity of the remaining four questions ranged between 4%-8% of the candidature.

The following is a summary of candidates' general performance in each question.

#### *Question 2: Learning English through Popular Culture*

This question required candidates to write an essay discussing reasons for the popularity among Instagrammers of taking photos of Hong Kong's housing estates, and residents' opinions on this phenomenon.

The majority of candidates showed that they understood the demands of the question and were able to describe and give a range of relevant and appropriate explanations, in addition to showing an understanding of the residents' viewpoints. Candidates generally addressed both parts of the question though some neglected to comment on the residents' perspectives or focused too much on the popularity of Instagram. Stronger essays included varied and creative ideas with greater elaboration. Most candidates showed an awareness of the teacher as audience and appropriately wrote in a formal to semi-formal tone.

Candidates showed an ability to use a range of linguistic forms to discuss the issue, including different tenses and aspects, passive and active forms, and direct and indirect speech to report interviewees'



opinions. Stronger essays were marked by greater grammatical accuracy, more varied vocabulary and more complex sentence structures.

Candidates were able to organise their ideas into an essay with a clear introduction, main body paragraphs and conclusion. Stronger candidates organised their ideas in the main body of the essay more coherently and also used a wider range of cohesive devices within and across paragraphs.

#### *Question 3: Learning English through Social Issues*

This question required candidates to write a news report explaining the decline in the number of stationery shops and whether these shops can survive.

Very few candidates misunderstood the task and most were able to identify the most obvious reasons in the general decline of stationery shops. Some candidates, however, did not discuss whether these shops could or would survive, which limited their score under content. Reasons given were sometimes tangential (e.g. the minimum wage) while phrases such as 'to commence with' were not appropriate for the text-type.

Some candidates were familiar with the genre of a news report and the style in which it would be written. Stronger candidates were more selective in their use of facts, and persuasive in raising awareness about the plight of stationery shops, often through sharing their childhood memories. Although many answers were written as a report rather than a news report, both formats were accepted so long as the purpose was to inform the reader, and the task requirements were addressed.

#### *Question 4: Learning English through Workplace Communication*

This question required candidates to write a formal letter to the manager of a hotel requesting a work transfer to a sister hotel, and giving reasons for this request.

Candidates generally understood the requirements of the question. Stronger candidates gave convincing and relevant professional reasons for wanting to transfer, such as desiring a new challenge, to explain why they were qualified for the position and convince the manager how this would benefit the hotel. However, quite a number of candidates struggled with producing relevant and persuasive arguments. Some candidates assumed a more familiar relationship with their manager, which was acceptable, but most used a more formal tone in the letter.

The use of plain English for business communication was appropriate for this question. Stronger letters were clear and concise without unnecessarily flowery language. These letters were more accurate in terms of grammar and included a greater variety of grammatical forms and a wider range of vocabulary related to the hotel as a workplace and to different jobs in a hotel context.

Candidates generally showed that they were familiar with the genre of a formal letter. Some candidates chose to integrate an account of their work experience with reasons for wanting to transfer, while others opted to give the three aspects of the question in separate paragraphs. Stronger candidates organised their ideas more coherently into clearly structured paragraphs with clear transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections.

#### *Question 5: Learning English through Sports Communication*

This question required candidates to write a letter to the President of the IOC proposing that dragon boat racing be included in the Olympics, and giving reasons for such a proposal. The three criteria that had to be met for a sport to be considered an Olympic event were provided in the question.

It was important to write about dragon boat racing and to engage with the criteria given. Some candidates misunderstood the question and proposed other sports to be included in the Olympics, such as e-sports. Others discussed alternative criteria which could be considered, but these ideas tended to be less persuasive as they did not address the standards set by the IOC. Weaker performances also tended to use

too informal a register or were marked by a lack of hedging. Other candidates struggled with having a stance that was unified and coherent, sometimes presenting the cons of dragon boat racing without linking sufficiently to the pros.

Stronger candidates made their letter persuasive, factual and to the point while also being respectful to the important recipient. Content that specifically addressed the sport of dragon boat racing and how it demonstrates the Olympic ideals, such as having a mixed crew and needing teamwork, were considered relevant. Discussion of traditional Chinese culture was considered relevant if linked to media coverage and potential revenue. This third criterion was the least well developed and understood.

#### *Question 6: Learning English through Debating*

This question required candidates to write an argumentative essay either for or against the effectiveness of food warning labels in changing people's eating habits. It was generally handled well.

Stronger candidates had little difficulty making convincing arguments and including counterarguments to add weight to these. Many candidates were able to draw parallels with other existing policies such as nutritional labelling and the inclusion of shocking images on cigarette packaging. Candidates also created imaginary findings and data to make their arguments more persuasive.

The weaker candidates in most cases struggled to make convincing and compelling arguments either for or against the label policy. Some candidates did not read the question carefully and argued from both sides. Others had repetitive arguments or similar ideas throughout the essay and therefore were unable to show enough development and support for ideas. There were some stock phrases that were either irrelevant or inappropriate.

#### *Question 7: Learning English through Poems and Songs*

Candidates were required to adopt the role of a reporter and write a feature article for a music magazine based on an interview with an up-and-coming pop star.

Candidates showed a lot of creativity in their articles, including varied accounts of the star's rise to fame and biographical details, and good imagination when describing the inspiration behind her music and the meanings of her songs. Most showed an awareness of the audience of readers of a music magazine familiar with pop music. Some adopted an objective perspective while others wrote more subjectively.

Stronger candidates wrote more accurately in terms of grammar, vocabulary and spelling, and made use of a range of complex and compound sentence patterns. Stronger candidates had a good knowledge of lexis related to music, the music industry and fame. They were also able to use a range of forms to create a strong sense of who Zoe Kwan was, including direct and indirect speech. Some adopted a more informal, journalistic register, though a formal register was also appropriate.

Some candidates organised their article much like an essay while others presented it in a question-and-answer format, which was perfectly appropriate for the genre. Stronger candidates made good use of sub-headings to organise their ideas, as well as creative titles, and opened and closed the article strongly. Some candidates organised their article through a chronology of Zoe's life.

#### *Question 8: Learning English through Short Stories*

Candidates were required to write the opening chapter of a story as part of their entry to a story competition in a sci-fi magazine. The main character (journalist), setting (research station in the Arctic) and problem (people in the station mysteriously disappearing) were provided in the question.

It was important not to write a complete narrative. Stronger candidates had very creative ideas and demonstrated an ability to engage the reader and capture their interest so that they would want to continue to the next chapter. Weaker candidates struggled with understanding aspects of the context provided in the question and this impacted on the relevance of the content.



The question allowed candidates to demonstrate an ability to use a wide range of grammatical items and vocabulary to establish the setting of the story, create a sense of place and character, narrate the events and use dialogue. Stronger candidates rose to this challenge and were able to write linguistically accurate narratives with varying degrees of complexity in form. Weaker candidates struggled with switches in tenses, punctuation in direct speech and vocabulary.

On the whole, candidates demonstrated familiarity with the discourse structure of the narrative genre. It was not necessary to write a sequential plot, and some narratives included flashbacks. Some candidates presented the narrative in the form of diary entries, which was appropriate.

#### *Question 9: Learning English through Drama*

In this question, candidates were required to write a blog describing how the writer changed their views on Chinese opera after watching a live performance at Xiqu Centre in West Kowloon Cultural District. Candidates were expected to respond to the prompt with some creativity and imagination.

Strong candidates were able, after a brief introduction, to describe what they experienced at the opera, using vivid and emotive language. They were able to deploy a range of appropriate vocabulary to describe the architecture of the opera house, costumes, music and Chinese opera characters. As candidates were writing from the perspective of someone who did not have any exposure to Chinese opera, specialist opera vocabulary was not required to score well in language.

Weaker candidates struggled to write on the Chinese opera experience, instead including a lot of other information about their travels. For some candidates, the blog genre posed a challenge as they had difficulty developing a personal voice that would attract blog readers.

#### Recommendations

##### Language

Candidates need to balance demonstrating what they know with making their writing appropriate to the particular text type they are asked to write. Writing simple sentences accurately might be enough in some tasks but might be too limited for others requiring more linguistic flexibility. It is a good idea for candidates to read different text types and to become familiar with what is appropriate for particular purposes and audiences.

As with language choice, coherence can be achieved in different ways depending on the text type. Candidates are usually quite good at connecting ideas explicitly in persuasive or argumentative essays. In some text types (e.g. blog, letter) too much logical development might actually detract from effective organisation, however. Again, familiarity with different text types is key to raising awareness of how these texts are organised effectively.

Part B tasks can be completed in around 400 words. Longer responses will not necessarily gain higher marks simply by virtue of length. If writing beyond the word guide, the length should not impede the communicative effectiveness.



### Paper 3

Paper 3 consists of three parts: Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates are required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 is designed to be the easier section, while Part B2 is more difficult. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 3 was 47,548, of whom 29.2% chose B1 and 70.8% chose B2.

#### Overall results

A statistical analysis of Paper 3 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Paper 3 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Part A	52	62.1	23.9
Part B1	53	40.7	25.6
Part B2	53	48.3	20.3

#### Part A (Compulsory section)

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings related to the theme of exploration. Unless otherwise stated, synonyms or similar wording were accepted as alternatives to the correct answers given here.

##### Task 1 (Mean = 80.2%)

Candidates were required to fill in a summary sheet while listening to a conversation between two people (Julia and Mark) who were looking at a webpage of an organisation called World Watch Travel and discussing an eco-friendly adventure holiday to the Brazilian rainforest.

Items 1-5 asked candidates to write short phrases regarding details of World Watch Travel. These items seemed straightforward for the majority of candidates except item 1 (55% correct) in which some candidates misspelt the country or wrote the adjective form rather than the required answer 'Brazil'.

For the remaining items in Task 1 in which candidates did not have to write a short phrase i.e. adding ticks to a table for items 8-10, and writing a letter of the alphabet for items 11-14, the mean was extremely high indicating that these were found to be very easy by the majority of candidates.

##### Task 2 (Mean = 69.2%)

Candidates were required to listen to an interview in which a documentary maker, Jason, was interviewing an American researcher, Dr Anita Carter, about her team's exploration of an area in the ocean called the Alonso Trench.

For item 17, candidates were required to write a short phrase on when the research started. This proved to be challenging for some candidates (58% correct) as they wrote answers which reflected the duration of the research (e.g. 'for about a year') rather than when it started (last spring). Items 18 and 19 were multiple-choice questions in which candidates had to select why the research team explored the area, and the area of the Alonso Trench in which new species of snailfish were found. Candidates performed extremely well in these two questions (77% and 96% correct respectively). For items 20-22, candidates had to identify three animals described in the interview from a series of six drawings and had to do this in the same order as the animals were mentioned in the recording. Again, candidates performed well (73%-82% correct) in these items. For items 23-26, candidates needed to complete a table regarding the two hardest parts of the body of the snailfish, and the corresponding function of each part. While item 23 seemed to be straightforward (76% correct), items 24-26 proved to be more challenging (40-56% correct). For item 25, some candidates incorrectly wrote 'ear bone' rather than the required answer ear bones (the plural form) and items 24 and 26 (the functions of the body part) were sometimes correctly

written but incorrectly matched to the wrong body part (e.g. 'scare off other fish' matched to 'ear bones'). For items 27-28, candidates had to tick (from a list of 6 items) which two deep sea conditions were difficult to maintain at sea level. Candidates performed extremely well on these items (82-86% correct). Item 29 was a multiple-choice question in which candidates had to infer how Dr Carter felt about studying snailfish (70% correct).

Similar to Task 1, candidates tended to perform significantly better in items which did not require them to write a short phrase.

#### Task 3 (Mean = 50.6%)

Candidates were required to listen to a conversation between two people visiting a history museum (Julia and Mark) and their guide. This conversation related to a museum exhibit which focused on an unsuccessful naval expedition to North-East Siberia. For the majority of the items, candidates were required to write a short phrase.

Items 30-37 related to various details of the expedition of the ship named *The Shadow*. For item 30, candidates had to state the year the journey began. Some candidates mistakenly wrote 1819, which in the recording was the year the planning for the expedition began, rather than the year the journey began (1821). For items 31 and 32, candidates had to write the technological features on *The Shadow*. Item 31 (42% correct) proved to be more challenging for candidates than item 32 (62% correct), perhaps because candidates were less familiar with the concept of a steam engine than a heating system.

For items 38 and 39, candidates had to write short phrases relating to details of the cause of death of the ship's crew. Item 39 (28% correct) proved to be more challenging for candidates than item 38 (48% correct). This was due to many candidates failing to include the idea of needing more or a huge number of calories.

For items 40-41, candidates were required to write words or short phrases relating to the discovery of the sunken ship. Item 40 proved to be particularly challenging for most candidates (25% correct). To answer this item correctly, candidates were required to conclude that there was similarity between the name of the ship (*The Shadow*) and the area in which the ship was found (Shadow Bay), despite it not being stated explicitly. Some candidates wrote down the ship and the area but failed to state that there was similarity. For item 41 (37% correct), some candidates incorrectly wrote 'fishermen' (the plural form) rather than the correct answer 'fisherman' or, more commonly, wrote the incorrect spelling 'fishman.'

#### Task 4 (Mean = 37.8%)

For Task 4, candidates were required to listen to three chapter extracts by Peter Dales from an audio book relating to his expedition to the Costa Rica jungle to find the statue of the Leopard God. This was followed by some thoughts on the audiobook extracts from Anna Connor, a podcast presenter. This task was designed to be more challenging for candidates: the content was less familiar to candidates and required a greater amount of interpretation and inference.

In the first extract, items 43 to 45 related to the journey through the jungle to attempt to find the statue of the Leopard God. Candidates were moderately successful in answering these items (34-42% correct) but some gaps in candidates' understanding were apparent. For item 43 (34% correct), some candidates did not grasp the concept that the leopard is the most powerful animal in the jungle and incorrectly wrote that the Leopard God is the most powerful animal. For item 45 (37% correct), candidates needed to understand the difference between *the reason the guides gave* for not wanting to continue with the journey ('they said that a recent earthquake had made the area dangerous' in the recording) and *Peter's opinion* regarding the real reason that the guides did not want to continue (being afraid of the Leopard God and not wanting to make the Leopard God angry).

In the second extract, items 46 to 47 were related to Peter finding the statue and the temple site. For item 46 (37% correct), candidates needed to understand and convey the meaning that the statue was broken and in ruins rather than intact and unbroken. Some candidates wrote answers such as 'a statue made of blue stone' rather than the correct answer simply 'blue stones'.



In the third extract, items 48 and 49 proved to be particularly challenging for candidates (28% correct and 23% correct respectively). For both items, it was possible to use a pronoun to refer to the (historical) items in the question 'Why did Peter's team take the items away from the temple?', but for the answer to be sufficiently clear the pronoun had to refer to the plural noun 'items' in the question. Some candidates incorrectly wrote 'to study it in the lab' for item 48 and 'to protect it from an earthquake' for item 49 rather than 'to study them...' and 'to protect them...'.

In the final section, item 52 (25% correct) was significantly more challenging for candidates than items 50-51. For item 52, candidates needed to grasp that the question was asking about how the historical items were used by people *in the past* and/or how people lived *in the past*. Many candidates incorrectly wrote their answers in the present tense.

In general, Part A worked very well, with a mean score of 62.1% and a good range of item difficulties. The tasks became progressively more difficult. This part made use of different spoken text types and item types, including graphical input, gap-fill, multiple-choice, short and long answer and summary/paraphrase.

#### Recommendations for Part A

Candidates should spend the preparation time familiarising themselves with the tasks. With the help of the given instructions/headings/prompts/choices, they may be able to predict the likely development of a text. They might also predict the vocabulary they will hear in the recording and make guesses about possible answers. Candidates should read the prompts and stems carefully to predict the required form of the answer, i.e. whether it should be a single noun, noun phrase, clause or sentence conveying a more complete meaning. For some tasks it is important to gain an understanding of the whole section of conversation and so candidates may consider jotting down notes first before coming back to complete their answers during the pauses. Candidates should also be prepared to use their own words rather than repeat the words they hear in the recording, as certain items may require them to infer answers not explicitly stated in the recording.

#### Part B

In Parts B1 and B2, candidates were instructed to adopt the role of Nico Lin, an employee of Star Pod ('the company'), an organisation that promotes space exploration and runs adventure camps for children. Candidates were asked to write or complete three documents related to the current activities of the company. In Part B1, candidates had to write a script for an instruction video, respond to a complaint letter, and complete the answers to the FAQ section of the company's website. In Part B2, the tasks were to write a script for an introductory video, a report about an incident on one of the company's machines, and a refusal email to a request from a charity.

Both parts shared a spoken text: a podcast in which the director of the company interviews a former astronaut and an astronomer who were connected with Star Pod. Candidates had to recognise and reproduce information from both the spoken text and the collection of written texts in the Data File. In addition to the content of their answers, candidates were graded on the accuracy of their English, the coherence and organisation of the information in their text, and the appropriacy of their response for the genre and intended audience.

#### Part B1

Candidates were asked to write a script for an instruction video for a long-running feature of the Star Pod camp called the 'Mars Experience Room'. Then they wrote a response to a complaint letter from a parent whose daughter had a bad experience at a camp run by Star Pod. Finally, candidates had to complete the FAQ section for the Star Pod website. For each of these tasks, candidates needed to identify and correctly organise relevant information from the sources into an appropriate, accurate text. In addition to the recording, which featured a podcast of senior figures at or involved with the company, candidates were given written texts including an email from director Ellen Ochoa ('the task email'), a letter from Mrs Sue Liu (the angry parent), an abstract from a journal article about 'Space Food', minutes of the company's Management Committee Meeting, an email exchange between Ms Ochoa and the Manager of the Adventure Camp run by the company, a poster from a previous camp's Mars Experience Room, an email



from Ms Ochoa to all staff, a Wikipage about Life on Mars, and the Star Pod activities Calendar for May 2020.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Paper 3 Part B1 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	S.D. (%)
5	18	37.8	27.4
6	18	46.6	30.9
7	17	37.6	25.9

From Table 4, it can be seen that Tasks 5 and 7 proved to be the most challenging for this year's B1 candidates. The overall mean was 40.7% for all of Part B1. It proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

#### Task 5

In this task, candidates were required to write a script for an instruction video for the Mars Experience Room, described as 'where kids go into a room and pretend they are exploring Mars'. They needed to identify the relevant information from the poster, the management committee meeting minutes, the Wikipage and the recording.

It was observed that many candidates were unfamiliar with script writing. These candidates seemed unaware that a script is a written text that is intended to be performed (and recorded for a video, in this case). Candidates seemed reluctant to use second person pronouns such as 'you' and 'your' to address their audience directly. While stronger candidates could do this, less able candidates tended to use third person pronouns like 'they' as if they thought the audience of the script was the parents, not the actual child participants. Some weaker candidates wrote the task as an essay, misinterpreting the genre and context entirely.

Stronger candidates were also able to write a few sentences to welcome the children to the activity, or round off the script by reminding them to have fun in the room. Such candidates even included encouraging words to heighten children's anticipation for the fun adventure ahead. Weaker candidates, on the other hand, went straight to the content points of the task without establishing or acknowledging this context.

Most candidates were able to follow the given instructions and use their own words to tell listeners what to do. They were able to use ideas from the recording to write an appropriate paragraph explaining the dangers of being on Mars and reminding participants to put on the space suit: item 5.1 was the best-answered in this task, followed by items 5.2 and 5.4.

For several content items, candidates found it challenging to pick up marks. Many candidates exhibited a problem in spelling the verb 'breathe' (item 5.3): most wrote the noun form 'breath'. Candidates were also unfamiliar with the phrase 'freeze to death' (item 5.5): those who mentioned this idea just used the word 'frozen' or 'freeze' but could not express the causality in this phrase. For the objectives of the activity (item 5.6), candidates could locate the relevant information on the poster, but not the amendment made in the meeting minutes: they wrote that the children had ten minutes instead of fifteen to collect the rock samples.

Items 5.7 to 5.9 were about what to do in a dust storm. Some candidates were able to give children advice on evacuation, but many missed the point in the recording that there was a possibility that one may get lost in the storm (item 5.9).



## Task 6

In Task 6, candidates were required to write an email response to a complaint letter from an angry parent whose child had suffered a bad experience at the camp. It was clear from the sources that the complaints were considered unjustified and candidates therefore needed to respond appropriately to each issue raised.

This was the strongest performing task among the candidates who attempted Part B1. Most candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the genre. They were able to write an appropriate opening paragraph expressing their concerns about the issues raised by the mother, Mrs Liu, and a closing paragraph thanking her for writing to Star Pod or encouraging her to write again if she needed further assistance. They organised the information coherently and maintained a positive tone in the reply. Stronger candidates also wrote an appropriate subject line which included the reason for writing the response. Stronger candidates were able to manipulate the relevant information and write concisely, whereas weaker candidates were more comfortable copying chunks of text from the Data File, failing to adjust the tone and register for a different audience.

The strongest candidates were also able to link the issue of Rey Liu's missing her turn in the Mars Experience Room with the invitation to the Open Day (item 6.7), and encourage Rey and her mother to attend. Weaker candidates ended the response without making any reference to the Open Day. It seemed that they missed the crucial information mentioned in the meeting minutes, or else failed to identify the girl referred to in the minutes as Rey Liu. Candidates performed worst in item 6.8, the date of the Open Day, despite being specifically instructed to listen out for this piece of information in the recording.

## Task 7

In Task 7, candidates were asked to finish the FAQ section of the Star Pod website. They were required to extract the relevant information from a variety of texts from the Data File, including the Star Pod calendar, an email to all staff from Ms Ochoa, and the management committee meeting minutes. Several items were also in the recording.

The instructions suggested candidates answer in complete sentences but most gave short answers. Of the candidates who followed the instructions, many had difficulty in constructing grammatically accurate sentences. Stronger candidates demonstrated good reader awareness – the FAQ section was for parents to read – and adjusted the tone and register of their responses accordingly: 'Your child will be taken to the Tsing Shan Hospital'; 'You should inform us before the camp begins' (in reference to allergies).

The most challenging items were 7.2 and 7.6. For 7.2, it seemed that candidates had difficulty answering 'how often?' They often gave an irrelevant time reference ('a year'; 'four years'; 'five days') and could not turn the information from the Data File into an expression of frequency. For item 7.6, it seemed that candidates were unfamiliar with the vocabulary item 'dormitory/dormitories' and tended to give general answers ('in the camp') unsuited to the need of the question.

The answers for items 7.9 to 7.11, and 7.14 came from the recording. Candidates had to write down what they had to bring to the camp. The vocabulary items 'sunscreen' (item 7.9) and 'comfortable clothes' (item 7.10) proved to be more challenging. Many candidates wrote that camp participants should bring their mobile phone, the opposite of an instruction repeated several times in the recording (item 7.14).

## Part B2

In Part B2, candidates were asked to write a script for an introductory video about the 'Planet Tarkov Problem-Solving Activity'; a report for the management committee about an incident on a piece of equipment at the camp – the Multi-Axis Trainer ('M.A.T.');

and an email to a charity refusing their request to borrow a replica Space Capsule, but instead offering some other benefits. Each task required candidates to identify the relevant information from a range of texts and to produce a written response that was well organised, appropriate to genre and audience, and written in a suitable range of accurate English. The written texts in the Data File included an email from Star Pod director Ellen Ochoa ('the task email'), minutes of a meeting of the company's management committee, a PowerPoint slide with instructions for the previous year's problem-solving activity, a medical examination form, feedback from the instructors about the previous year's instructions, a letter from a charity (the 'Locae Foundation'), an engineer's assessment form, a webpage from the company's website, and an assessment of the feasibility



of moving the capsule. In addition, candidates were instructed to take notes on a podcast featuring the director of the company, a former astronaut, and an astronomer.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B2 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	S.D. (%)
8	18	53.9	22.2
9	18	52.8	21.2
10	17	37.8	25.5

From Table 5, it can be seen that Task 10 was the most challenging task, whereas Tasks 8 and 9 were of a similar level of difficulty. The overall mean was 48.3% for all of Part B2.

#### Task 8

In Task 8, candidates were asked to write a script to be used in a video introducing the Planet Tarkov Problem-Solving Activity, one of the experiential learning activities held at Star Pod's camp. The audience were the children participating in the activity, so the script needed to include the background and parameters of the exercise presented in a 'lively and exciting' way, according to the task email. Information for the script could be found in the management committee meeting minutes, the previous year's PowerPoint slide, a collection of feedback from the camp's instructors, and background information about the planet Tarkov in the recording.

This task was well answered by candidates, who used a variety of tones and registers to try and engage with their youthful audience. Stronger candidates were able to use highly appropriate phrases to frame the information in their script – 'Are you guys excited today?' – whereas weaker responses tended to miss the context and the intended audience. Closing phrases were similarly indicative of audience and genre awareness: 'try your best and enjoy the activity'; 'See you on Tarkov!'

Candidates performed well across the range of content points, with slightly lower averages for items from the recording. This was especially true for items 8.6 and 8.7, where weaker candidates struggled to express the causality in 'in summer, the temperature is so high that the oceans boil' / 'in winter the temperature is so low that the oceans would freeze'. Candidates performed best in factual items that they could extract directly from the Data File, item 8.8 for example. Weaker candidates tended to be misled by the changes that needed to be made from the previous year's instructions, copying information directly from the outdated PowerPoint slide.

#### Task 9

In Task 9, candidates needed to identify relevant information from a series of texts to write a report on an incident at Star Pod's space camp. This involved a malfunction of the company's 'Multi-Axis Trainer' (M.A.T.) and an 11-year-old student at the camp, Rey Liu. The audience were the management committee of Star Pod so a range of formal and semi-formal registers were possible, but the overall tone of the report needed to reflect the potential seriousness of the incident and a factual presentation of the events. Input texts included the management committee meeting minutes, a medical examination form and an engineering assessment.

Overall, this task was answered well, and candidates appeared to be comfortable with this genre. A challenging item was 9.2, where candidates needed to include all the basic relevant information about the incident, gathered from the sources. Candidates who focused on or copied extensively from one area of the input text(s) were likely to miss one of the key details. Another challenge for candidates was to establish the correct actors in item 9.4. Candidates using passive voice forms were able to bypass this problem in a way that was highly appropriate to the genre of the text.



Candidates performed best in expressing the cause of the incident ('motor failure', item 9.5) and in the recommendation to cut back the branches (item 9.9), although many candidates missed the intertextual recommendation to use 'silicon sealant' in fixing the roof (item 9.8), perhaps an unfamiliar vocabulary item, but placed in a clear context in the management committee meeting minutes.

#### Task 10

Task 10 was the most challenging in the paper in terms of both the content points and tone and register. Candidates were asked to write an email refusing a request from a charity organisation to borrow the company's replica space capsule, but instead to offer a range of benefits to support the charity. The instruction was for candidates to 'show sensitivity' in their response. Input texts included the recording, the management committee meeting minutes, the letter from the charity, a page from the Star Pod website and a transport feasibility assessment from the company's engineer.

Many candidates had difficulties with the coherence of the information they were presenting and the appropriacy of some of their language. They tended to copy large chunks of text from the Data File, especially from the engineering assessment. This often made their reasoning for refusing the request confusing and obscure, and suggested a difficulty switching between the registers of factual report and carefully-worded response to a disappointed reader. Tonally, the best strategy would be to briefly state (and therefore minimise) the refusal so that more time could be spent on the offers and benefits suggested by the company. Another indication of the difficulty of shifting genres was in the inclusion of a number of inappropriate phrases from the company's internal communications. These included 'we needed to spend the money more wisely rather than on wasting money moving the capsule just to help a charity' and 'given our company's dire financial situation'. Although clearly unsuitable for external communications, many candidates included these phrases to justify the refusal.

Beyond the content points, the email needed to be polite, appropriately apologetic, and then excited about the benefits on offer. The inclusion of a phatic closing established or maintained a congenial relationship between the company and the charity. In general, the strongest candidates were able to include these features, whereas weaker attempts tended to focus on the content points.

The most challenging items were those that required materials adapted from the recording, particularly items 10.6 through 10.8, which referred to the astronaut Trillion Choi. Weaker candidates struggled with the spelling of these key terms, and recreating complex information about her: she was 'the sixth female Asian astronaut' (item 10.7) and 'an Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics' (item 10.8). The latter item was the most challenging, containing information from more than one source, including the recording.

The exception to the difficult recording items was item 10.3, which only required listeners to record a well-signposted date ('25 April'). Indeed, items 10.2 and 10.3 were the best-answered in the task and at the core of the correspondence candidates had been asked to write. Overall, candidates appeared to be very familiar with the genre features of an email and structured information appropriately.

#### Recommendations for Part B

Candidates were very comfortable with extracting concise units of information from the recording but had difficulty in identifying the relevance of longer segments. This was also true for some of the more complex content points taken from written texts. It is suggested that candidates find opportunities to practise this skill and expose themselves to a variety of written and spoken English to assist them in identifying relevant information. In terms of their writing, candidates seemed to be very familiar with a range of genres but they are advised to challenge themselves to write in different styles and tones, and for a more varied audience.

One common fault is the copying of large sections of text from the Data File, which may include information and language inappropriate for the task. Candidates need to look across several texts, synthesise and summarise the key points for the task, and reproduce these in a tone and register appropriate for the purported reader.