



ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 1

PART A

Reading Passages

8:30 am – 10:00 am (1½ hours)
(for both Parts A and B)

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) There are two parts (A and B) in this paper. All candidates should attempt Part A. In Part B, you should attempt either Part B1 (easier section) OR Part B2 (more difficult section). Candidates attempting Parts A and B2 will be able to attain the full range of levels, while Level 4 will be the highest level attainable for candidates attempting Parts A and B1.
- (2) After the announcement of the start of the examination, you should first write your Candidate Number and stick barcode labels in the spaces provided on the appropriate pages of the Part A Question-Answer Book and the Part B Question-Answer Book which you are going to attempt.
- (3) Write your answers in the spaces provided in the Question-Answer Books. Answers written in the margins will not be marked.
- (4) For multiple-choice questions, you are advised to blacken the appropriate circle with a pencil so that wrong marks can be completely erased with a clean rubber. Mark only **ONE** answer to each question. Two or more answers will score **NO MARKS**.
- (5) Supplementary answer sheets will be supplied on request. Use separate supplementary answer sheets for Part A and Part B. Write your Candidate Number, mark the question number box and stick a barcode label on each sheet, and fasten them with string **INSIDE** the relevant Question-Answer Book.
- (6) No extra time will be given to candidates for sticking on barcode labels or filling in the question number boxes after the 'Time is up' announcement.
- (7) The two Question-Answer Books you have attempted (one for Part A and one for Part B) will be collected together at the end of the examination. Fasten the two Question-Answer Books together with the green tag provided.
- (8) The unused Question-Answer Book for Part B will be collected separately at the end of the examination. This will not be marked. Do not write any answers in it.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART A

- (1) The Question-Answer Book for Part A is inserted in this Reading Passages booklet.
- (2) Attempt ALL questions in Part A. Each question carries ONE mark unless otherwise stated.

Not to be taken away before the
end of the examination session

PART A

Read Text 1 and answer questions 1-23 in the Question-Answer Book for Part A.

Text 1

Hong Kong's comic industry is proverbially in shreds. The biggest saboteur? The internet

1 [1] In recent months, old-school Hong Kong comics appear to be gaining much attention. Alfonso Wong, the genius behind the Old Master Q series that has captivated countless readers since 1962, showcased 128 drawings at an auction. All those pieces were sold at the event, which drew more than 5,000 visitors in 10 days, evidence that fans are still rabid for
5 traditional comics.

[2] Meanwhile, there is an exhibition by another homegrown comic mastermind, Lee Wai Chun Theresa, the artist-author behind the popular Miss 13 Dot series. Her '13-Dot' exhibition at Comix Home Base in Wan Chai is also hotly tipped.

10 [3] To the undiscerning observer, it's easy to interpret these signs as evidence of a healthy homegrown industry. In truth, they are rare moments of reprieve from a harsher reality: the traditional comic industry in Hong Kong is dying. Its pains have frequently been reported in the media: years of declining book sales, industry players struggling to make a living. What led to this predicament? Does the highly visual book culture, which has captivated many generations of fans, have a future? It may one day become a relic, only accessible at
15 cultural exhibitions and auction houses.

[4] During the heyday for comics in the 1980s and 1990s, illustrators like Hong Kong artist Lam Cheung Kwan Elphonso could make a living drawing comics exclusively, just as he did while working on titles like 'True Love', 'The Jam' and 'Super Seven'. "Now, if I only drew comics, I wouldn't make enough income," he says.

20 [5] Lam's latest comics include 'Seer', which is featured in a local magazine, and the artist also just released 'The Greatest Hits' this month, a collection of short story illustrations he penned from the 1990s to now. Additionally, he has to juggle many jobs, including storyboarding for films, design work for fashion brands, figurine production and artwork for merchandising: many industry veterans like himself who have experienced the heyday for comics have seen their profession dwindle into sidejobs.

25 [6] The main culprit behind this predicament? "Free website comics have destroyed the industry," he says. Readers can get shorter four-block strips online, which are updated frequently, at no cost. Like many industries disrupted by the internet revolution – music, newspapers, TV and films – the comic scene is struggling against the tide of free original or pirated content. "In this age, readers think they don't need to pay for comics, like free music," says Lam.

30 [7] The threshold to enter the scene has become low. Anyone can become a comic artist; all you need is a website. Traditionally, artists like Lam laboured for years to acquire skills to draw comics and to secure opportunities in the profession. Success back then meant generating quality books that achieved high sales. Now? "If you upload comics to a website and generate many clicks, you can become famous," says Lam. He thinks poor quality digital content by amateurs has contributed to the industry's collapse.

35 [8] Official statistics about this sector are difficult to get. Alan Wan, CEO of Anitime Animation Studio and one of the founding directors at the Hong Kong Comics and Animation Federation, reveals educated estimates. He has been in the business since the 1970s in various roles starting first as a writer and then moving into production, licensing, syndication, and management. He recalls the peak between 1995 and 2000 when the market generated around HKD700 million from local comics, Chinese-translated Japanese Manga and more. "By 2010 that figure fell to around HKD300 million, a drop of more than 50 percent," Wan says.

40 [9] These numbers were collated from more than 80 companies that were part of the Hong Kong Comics and Animation Federation. The executive agrees that free digital comics have obliterated a significant portion of the market, but stresses that a toxic storm of other factors has also contributed to the current pains. There's the dwindling distribution network. For instance, comic stores are a dying breed. There were around 350 comic stores at the peak of the market, now there are less than 100, he says. Likewise, street news vendors, who comic publishers depended
45 on to stock their print material, are nearing extinction.



50 [10] “The Hong Kong government will not grant new licenses to newsstands, which is why you see them less nowadays.” Additionally, these independent street operators are unable to compete with the proliferation of convenience store chains, which have become a more prevalent medium for selling various printed materials. They charge higher fees than newsstands to have content stocked in their stores, so many comic book publishers do not use this platform.

55 [11] The industry veteran left the local comic scene four years ago to join the animation TV, film and toy business in the Mainland at Anitime Animation Studio. “It’s tough being in a new business and a totally different environment, but if I had stayed in Hong Kong, I would have faced having to shrink my business and changing everything just for a small market.” Wan would rather work hard to overcome his challenges in the Mainland (which include different regulations and audience tastes), as he’s optimistic about the prospect of greater gains in a bigger market if he succeeds.

[12] Many former publishers like himself have adapted in the new era, whether it’s by switching to different markets or mediums or by branching out to other sides of the business such as licensing digital content to gaming companies. “You can’t just rely on the old market of comic book publishing,” Wan says.

60 [13] Yet he remains positive about the industry’s outlook, hoping it becomes more creative and innovative in these evolving times. “People want more content from many devices, not only from publishing but from TV, mobiles, game consoles and computers.” Wan insists that in these more connected and globalised times, content producers need to reevaluate their competitors and consumers, as every product needs to be international, not local. “Your competition is now worldwide,” he says. So locally-focused content, which only Hong Kongers can appreciate, won’t export well. He advises instead: conceive good content that attracts a broader audience.

65 [14] Lam agrees that a greater diversity of comic styles is needed as the new generation of readers demand new stories and visuals. While other leading comic nations like the US and Japan have worked to stay in tune with the evolving readership, this is not so in Hong Kong. “Many old-school comic artists have not updated their kung fu-style, which was popular from the 1960s to the 1990s,” explains Lam. The artist adds most young people find these fighting comics outdated. “Now they want lifestyle comics about girlfriends and boyfriends, families or themes relatable to the troubles in their lives.”

70 [15] He’s pessimistic about the industry’s future, citing the demolition of the Kowloon Walled City as an example of how culture and history is unappreciated in Hong Kong. “People’s style here is money, money, money. They don’t want to keep the culture. They just destroy and destroy.” Asked whether he foresees improvements in the industry anytime soon, he simply shrugs.

END OF READING PASSAGE

Sources of materials used in this paper will be acknowledged in the *HKDSE Question Papers* booklet published by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority at a later stage.