

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 45,029. A total of 20,392 candidates chose to do Part B1 (about 45.3%) while 24,637 (about 54.7%) 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	49.4	22.3
Part B1	42	47.4	18.1
Part B2	42	41.3	19.7

Part A (Compulsory section)

Part A was an article about the Hong Kong comic industry and its future prospects. The text outlined the status of the comic industry in Hong Kong from the perspective of both industry creatives such as comic artists as well as industry executives. Both presented their opinions regarding the outlook for the industry. A range of items such as cloze passage, table completion and proof-reading tasks were included.

The questions in Part A answered correctly by the highest numbers of candidates were Q.1 (multiple choice gap fill), answered correctly by between 67% and 83% of candidates; Q.2 (finding an item of vocabulary with specific meaning) with 80% of candidates answering correctly; Q.4 (identifying evidence from the text to support a statement) with between 71% and 79% of candidates answering correctly; and Q.10 (True-False-Not Given, testing detailed understanding of the passage) between 77% and 87% of candidates answering 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.

Vocabulary questions, albeit multiple choice questions such as Q.3 and Q.8 or more open-ended vocabulary questions such as Q.6 and Q.9, were successfully answered by between 54% and 71% of candidates.

Question 11 was a proofreading task. Markers found this to be a good question as it tested paragraph-level understanding of meaning. Less success was noted in Q.11i-ii. Candidates often lost marks with simple errors in parts of speech (e.g. Q.11i 'loss' vs 'lose').

Just over half of the candidates answered Q.12 correctly, with two key issues in their response. First, some candidates did not follow the task instructions and failed to state their position (i.e. stating a 'Yes' or 'No') before providing evidence to support this position. The other issue was with candidates who expressed either a negative or positive position but provided evidence to the contrary.

Some of the more challenging items were found in Q.22. Candidates answered more successfully when only a short response or single word response was expected. For example, around 63% of candidates answered Q.22iv correctly. Where candidates were expected to provide longer responses to complete the sentences in the table, candidates were less successful (e.g. Q.22ii with only 19% of candidates responding successfully). This was often a result of grammatical errors such as tense (e.g. Q.22ii 'do not')

instead of 'have not'), subject-verb agreement (e.g. Q.22i 'in this evolving times' instead of 'in these evolving times').

In general, sentence completion questions proved to be more challenging for candidates (e.g. Q.7, Q.14, Q.18 and Q.22). Candidates should be aware of the grammar and contextual clues in the parts of the sentence provided. For example, in Q.14(i), the sentence for completion begins with 'Comic book publishers need a...' and hence requires a noun phrase starting with a consonant sound to be successfully completed.

Candidates should be mindful when considering answering reference questions. For instance, only 25% of candidates answered Q.15 successfully. Many candidates' answers included: word form errors e.g. 'convenient' vs 'convenience'; singular / plural errors e.g. 'chain' vs 'chains'; or errors related to determiners such as 'some' or 'the'. All of these were sufficient to render the candidate's response incorrect. Other questions that appeared more challenging were those which tested the use of metaphors, such as Q.13, where only 38% of candidates answered correctly.

Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 comprised two reading passages linked by the theme of job seeking. These were considered to be accessible for most readers. The first passage was a collection of four classified ads for job vacancies. The second text was an online article introducing the concept of the 'slasher'. This second text introduced opinions from a variety of stakeholders related to the employment options for graduates and graduate recruitment. In addition to the article, a readers' comments section was also included.

The items in Part B1 answered correctly by the highest numbers of candidates were Q.25i and Q.25iii (matching a job ad to a statement about the job vacancies), which were both answered correctly by over 81% of candidates; Q.26 (Job B) (Job C) (matching the skills required to each job vacancy) with between 78% and 87% of candidates answering correctly; Q.38i (identifying whether statements are mentioned in the text) with 68% of candidates answering correctly; and Q.42 (identifying if the readers agree/disagree with a statement) with approximately 68% of candidates answering correctly.

With somewhat simpler texts in this part, candidates were able to tackle a wider range of item types successfully. Success in these items further strengthened the impression of a satisfactory level of fundamental reading skills amongst candidates.

A number of candidates, however, were not mindful of the task instructions. For example, in Q.26, candidates were informed that they 'may tick more than one box for each job'. For Job A and Job D, two ticks were required. This led to a loss of marks when candidates responded with only one tick.

Many candidates copied excessively for Q.32, Q.34 and Q.36, often leading to a loss of marks. Candidates should remember that large chunks of copied material are unlikely to be judged as correct answers. In Q.32 and Q.36, some kind of textual manipulation from the passage was required, not just straight copying. For instance, the pronouns needed to be changed in these items in order to gain marks.

Questions testing referencing skills appeared to be more challenging for candidates with Q.31, Q.34, Q.37 and Q.41 only being answered correctly by between 13% and 23% of candidates. Markers considered Q.41 to be a particularly effective question as 'they' referred back to the ideas expressed in the main part of the article, thus testing the candidates' understanding of the overall text.

When candidates are asked to use a word or phrase taken from specific parts of the text, they should ensure that the word is correctly lifted from the text and that it has not been changed in relation to grammar, for example, Q.35i 'risk' vs 'risks'; or spelling, for example, Q.42v where some candidates wrote 'partonised' instead of 'patronised'.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 comprised one text evaluating the ethical concerns of adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) in business operations. Challenges in this part included understanding a theme which was less familiar, and understanding the conflicting ideas and opinions expressed by the various stakeholders represented in the text. Candidates were required to respond to a range of items including identifying the implied

meaning of phrases, matching comments to the people mentioned in the text as well as sentence and table/summary completion using candidates' own words.

In this part of the paper, candidates were more successful in answering items asking for key information from the text such as Q.43iii, Q.57 and Q.64v-vi, which were answered correctly by over 70% of candidates. Items asking about the tone and intention of the writer including vocabulary/idiomatic expressions (e.g. Q.47, Q.59, Q.65) were answered correctly by at least 60% of candidates, suggesting that candidates dealt well in general with higher-order skills when tested through structured questions.

Candidates faced challenges in dealing with Part B2's more complex text, especially in questions which tested inference and detailed understanding of the text. For example, Q.53, Q.56 and Q.61 were answered correctly by between 21% and 55% of candidates. These all required candidates to use a word or phrase taken from the text. Candidates were less successful when the questions asked them to use their own words. Items such as Q.49i-iii required answers that typically could not be copied from the text (which many candidates tried to do). These questions needed at least some grammatical manipulation to arrive at the correct answer. Such questions required a complex set of skills, which the strongest candidates were able to employ. Q.50 indicated that some candidates were able to understand the overall ethical concerns that were being discussed in the text (e.g. Q.50ii and iv were answered correctly by 90% and 66% of candidates respectively). However, when explaining in more detail the debates that the use of AI raised, the candidates' use of language resulted in between only 18% and 32% of candidates answering Q.50i, iii and v correctly.

Candidates commonly made mistakes when attempting to express the relationship between two related but conflicting ideas such as in Q.52 (the expectation that AI brings greater objectivity yet with it there can be embedded biases) and Q.62 (companies and organisations refusing to take responsibility while also fighting external oversight of their actions). Such candidates missed the complexity of the issues described in the text and hence were not awarded a point for these items.

A final point to make is that a significant number of candidates copied from the text in such items as Q.54, and Q.61, often leading to a lack of logic in their answers. Sentence completion questions inevitably entail the testing of language. In such items, linguistic contextual clues were often overlooked by candidates and thus marks were often lost because of incorrect grammar, inappropriate collocations or illogical answers. For example, only 22% of candidates answered Q.51 correctly with a complete clause and only 8% of candidates used an appropriate collocation following the verb 'address' when answering Q.63.

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.

Recommendations

Candidates should copy words and phrases carefully when answering items requiring a single word or phrase taken straight from the text, and hence avoid spelling mistakes or making any unnecessary amendments to the word or phrase, such as changing between singular and plural or changing the word form.

Candidates also need to recognise when a question calls for a longer, more open answer, and avoid copying excessively (e.g. Q.13, Q.43).

Candidates are also reminded to pay attention to grammatical prompts at the beginning of sentence-completion questions (e.g. Q.14, Q.22, Q.35, Q.42); plurality (e.g. Q.37 'them' and Q.41 'they' referring to more than one item or a person requiring a plural countable noun in the answer); as well as the page layout and spaces provided for their answers (e.g. Q.4 provides two numbered lines (i) and (ii) indicating the requirement of two separate responses).

Candidates should be mindful when identifying figurative or metaphorical language used in the texts to select more focused chunks of language (e.g. in Q.5, Q.13, Q.44, candidates often lifted chunks of language that were too long to identify which part of the chunk was actually the relevant and accurate part for the answer).