

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 45,507 of whom around 44% chose B1 and around 56% chose B2. Candidates who attempt Parts A and B2 can 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	51.4	24.7
Part B1	42	48.2	21.8
Part B2	42	46.7	20.3

Part A (Compulsory section)

Part A consisted of two reading passages on the theme of flash fiction. The first passage was a how-to guide on writing flash fiction taken from a website. The second passage was an example of flash fiction. A range of items such as multiple choice, short responses, cloze passages and proof-reading were included. Candidates were also required to identify and match the views of characters from the example of flash fiction.

The items in Part A that were successfully answered by 70% or more of candidates were: Q.2, Q.5ii, Q.9, Q.11, Q.16iv and Q.22i. These represented a range of questions identifying relatively simple factual information, identifying and analysing simple vocabulary and understanding character attitudes and opinions. These suggest that the majority of candidates possessed a good range of fundamental reading skills in English. Indeed, in Part A most items were answered correctly by at least 50% of candidates, suggesting solid reading skills.

Many examiners and markers noted that some candidates did not follow task instructions such as using a word taken from a certain paragraph or from the text. For example, many candidates responded to Q.7iii with 'ending', 'last' or 'final' and Q.14i with 'lessons' or 'lesson'. These did not appear in the stated paragraphs and so candidates were not awarded a point for such answers. Similarly, some candidates did not follow instructions regarding the number of words required in the answer. When asked to find 'a word' in the text in Q.5iii, some candidates answered with 'a lot of'. Again, these candidates were not awarded a point for such an answer.

Examiners and markers also noted that candidates at the lower range seemed to struggle with the proof-reading question. Many candidates' responses were ungrammatical. For instance, in Q.6i some candidates responded with 'oppose', 'opposition', 'opposite' or chose vocabulary they seemingly did not fully understand, e.g. Q.6v 'realm'. However, over 60% of candidates successfully identified Q.6ii as the line of the summary with no mistakes.

As in previous years, a number of candidates produced answers with spelling errors when copying words from the text into their Question-Answer Book. For example, when completing gap-fill items some candidates wrote the following: Q.7iv 'sens' or 'scense' and Q.14ii 'mubled', 'numbled' or 'munbled' leading to a loss of marks. In addition, it was apparent that some candidates did not read the questions with care, e.g. for Q.19, a number of candidates responded with the incorrect focus. This question asked

'what' Professor Snookhorn was proud of rather than 'who' he was proud of. However, it was pleasing to note that in Q.20 and Q.22, very few of candidates' responses used repeated letters. They therefore avoided the loss of marks that this would have entailed.

Finally, examiners and markers felt that the more open questions helped discriminate candidates in the higher range. For instance, in Q.10, weaker candidates were unable to express the meaning accurately with only 40% of candidates answering this item correctly.

Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 comprised two reading passages linked by the theme of guide dogs for the visually impaired with a theme and discourse considered to be accessible for most readers. The first passage was a collection of three brief biographies of guide dogs and their owners. The second text was an online news article outlining the issues and challenges of training guide dogs 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.

Q.24i-iii, Q.28, Q.33i and iii were all answered correctly by at least 70% of candidates. These items were all related to the short simple biographies of the first text demonstrating a similar range of skills as the Part A items mentioned above. Success in these items further strengthened the impression of a satisfactory level of fundamental reading skills amongst candidates. The eight items in Q.44 and Q.45 tested more global understanding and were moderately well answered with between 31% and 63% of candidates answering them correctly.

Many candidates had difficulty with Q.39, being a sentence completion item requiring textual manipulation, rather than just copying from the passage. In this item, candidates were required to change the verb 'familiarise', which appeared in the text, to the adjective + preposition 'familiar with' in their answer. Q.43 also appeared challenging to candidates, with only 4% of candidates answering this question correctly. This reference question demanded that candidates understand that the reference stretched back several paragraphs from paragraph 10 to paragraph 3 rather than a much closer reference within the passage. When asked to identify a phrase used in the passages (e.g. Q.31) or select evidence from the passages (e.g. Q.42), many candidates again copied indiscriminately. Such over-copying resulted in an answer with a lack of focus or which incorporated inaccurate or irrelevant content. In Q.42, some candidates selected evidence from paragraph 10 rather than from paragraph 9, as instructed in the question.

Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 comprised one text of two parts linked by the theme of the impact of some of the significant women in Michelle Obama's life. The first part was an essay written by Michelle Obama reflecting on her memories of her mother and her mother's parenting style. The second part was an excerpt from Michelle Obama's memoir focusing on her relationship with her great-aunt. Candidates were required to respond to a range of items including identifying the implied meaning of phrases and the conflicting ideas in the writer's childhood as well as sentence and table / summary completion using their own words.

In Part B2, candidates were more successful in answering items asking for specific detail / information from the text with between 50% and 90% of candidates responding successfully. This included Q.47-Q.52, Q.57 and Q.62. Candidates were also relatively successful when answering questions on global understanding. For example, in Q.68i-v, in which candidates were asked to match the summary headings to the different paragraphs of the text, between 53% and 80% of candidates answered correctly.

Examiners and markers felt that Q.65i-v was a good test of the higher range candidates as it required candidates to complete the gaps with one word of their own rather than lifting a word from the passage. This meant candidates were required to produce a response which was both grammatically accurate and which conveyed the correct meaning as well as demonstrating an understanding of connotation and collocation. Between 4% and 43% of candidates answered these items correctly.

As could be expected, items where candidates struggled were often testing inferencing skills and more detailed understanding including Q.54, Q.56, Q.60, Q.61 and Q.64, which were answered correctly by between 13% and 29% of candidates. These questions tested some of the higher-order reading skills

interpreting the meaning behind Michelle Obama's words that we would expect to see in the stronger readers choosing to take Part B2.

A final point to make is that a significant number of candidates copied extensively from the text, often leading to a range of problems in their responses. This was particularly seen in Q.53iv, Q.54 and Q.55. Such problems included a resultant lack of logic in their answers, the incorporation of irrelevant or inaccurate content, and a failure to demonstrate their ability to distinguish between specific examples and broader conclusions.

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

The instructions provided to candidates for answering exam questions are crucial in ensuring that the requirements of the questions are clearly delivered. It is important for candidates to read and understand the instructions carefully, especially with regard to specific requirements such as the use of certain words or phrases from particular paragraphs in the passages. This can be a determining factor in scoring marks for certain questions and neglecting such instructions can lead to a loss of marks.

Additionally, when candidates are required to lift language from the passages, they should ensure that they spell the words correctly. In cases where a question calls for a longer and more open answer, candidates should be careful not to copy excessively, as seen in Q.42 and Q.53iv. The danger of copying excessively is that the candidate may fail to demonstrate their understanding of the ideas tested and may lose marks as a result.

In some questions, grammatical prompts may be given, such as at the beginning of sentence-completion items (e.g. Q.18, Q.30, Q.39, Q.46) and candidates should pay close attention to such prompts. They should also take note of plurality, as in Q.13 where the question required the identification of 'whose faces'.

Candidates need to be mindful of the use of figurative and metaphorical language in the texts. In such cases, it is advisable to select more focused and shorter chunks of language, as seen in Q.12. If candidates lift overlong stretches of text, it becomes difficult for them to clearly demonstrate that they have identified the pertinent part of the text.

Candidates may also need further practice in understanding referencing within a text and the relationships between ideas, especially when references are made over longer stretches of a text. This is important in ensuring that candidates can demonstrate a clear understanding of the topic and how the ideas presented in the text relate to each other.

As demonstrated again this year, this paper's purpose is to test candidates' ability to deal with a range of genres and text types, from a variety of authors and contexts in which they are written. This year's reading passages were taken from both fiction and non-fiction, from personal memoirs and news reports. These were sourced both locally and from abroad. Candidates are encouraged to embrace the opportunities available to them to read as widely as possible in order to increase exposure to genres and text-types, to enhance their reading skills as well as to build up their knowledge of lexis, syntax, connotation and so on.

Paper 2

Paper 2 tests candidates' writing skills and consists of two parts: Part A and Part B. Candidates have 2 hours to complete both parts of the paper. The total number of candidates attempting Paper 2 was 45,362.

Overall Results

Parts A and B were assessed in three domains: content, language and organisation on a scale between 0 and 7 for each domain. A statistical analysis of Paper 2 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 2.