



*Let the mind manage the body
Que l'esprit gère le corps*

**MAURITIUS
EXAMINATIONS
SYNDICATE**

NCE 2023

GRADE 9

English

Subject code: N500

EXAMINERS' REPORT

Key messages

- Most candidates have acquired the essential skills in basic grammar, reading, and writing.
- In literature, most candidates have been able to identify simple literary devices and their functions.
- In grammar, candidates had difficulty with
 - The difference between past perfect and simple past (Q 1, Item 4 – *Yesterday my cousins came to visit me.*)
 - Prepositions when time is indicated (Q 1, Item 5 – *The film will start in half an hour.*)
 - Negatives (Q1, Item 12 – *The match will not be organised.*)
 - Transforming into Direct Speech (Q1, item 15 - *The teacher asked us if we were hungry.*)
 - Plurals in structures starting with 'one (Q5, item 1 - *one of the most famous painters...*)
- In Reading Comprehension, literal understanding has been generally mastered by most candidates. Difficulties remain with
 - Indiscriminate lifting
 - Higher-order reading skills (inference, chronology of events, personal response...)
 - Vocabulary in context
- Extended writing remains a challenge for many candidates. Candidates should pay closer attention to their use of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Weaker candidates have serious difficulties with sentence separation.
- Narrative essays require candidates to develop a storyline and use varied sentence structures and a wide-ranging vocabulary to sustain the reader's interest. Evidence of narrative techniques must be visible.
- Descriptive essays require candidates to show a wide range of vocabulary to create an atmosphere. Far too often narrative essays were produced instead of descriptive ones. Evidence of sensory language must be shown.
- Argumentative essays require relevant information to be organised coherently and ideas need to flow logically. Some candidates simply listed ideas one after the other.
- Candidates are reminded that no credit will be given if they use material from elsewhere in the question paper to write their essays.

Question 1 – Basic Grammar

Question 1 tests an array of basic grammatical concepts in English. The grammatical items evaluated were pronouns (Possessive and Reflexive), the use of tenses (simple past and future tense), prepositions, comparisons, quantifiers, negative structures, punctuation, use of conjunctions and the ability to transform sentences from the indirect to the direct speech. The best-done items were those dealing with possessive and reflexive pronouns and common prepositions. Candidates faced more difficulty with items assessing the transformation of sentences from indirect to direct speech and transforming sentences into negatives.

Item 1 – This item was well done on the whole. Some candidates did not realise that the superlative degree of comparison was needed here. A common incorrect answer was “taller” instead of “tallest”.

Item 2 - The item on the use of the possessive pronouns was well-tackled by the majority of candidates. The pronoun ‘her’ for ‘My sister’ was correctly used in most cases.

Item 3 – This item on preposition was mostly well-attempted by the candidates.

They understood that the required preposition (We stayed **at** my uncle’s place) needed to indicate location.

Item 4 - This item tested the use of the simple past tense. It posed difficulty to a noticeable number of candidates, with many choosing **have come* as the answer. Candidates are reminded that when a specific moment in the past is referred to (such as yesterday, last week etc.) the past simple tense is required, and not the past perfect tense.

Item 5 - This question on preposition was mostly well-attempted by the candidates. They understood that the required preposition (The film will start **in** half an hour) referred to the time in which an event would happen. Some candidates wrongly gave **at* as an answer, suggesting that they had not read the item carefully enough.

Item 6 - This item tested the use of the reflexive pronoun **themselves**, which reflects an action back on the subject. It was well attempted by most candidates.

Item 7- This item tested the use of the interrogative adverb **where** which is used to ask questions relating to a place. It was generally well done by candidates.

Item 8 – This item assessed the coherence of tenses within a sentence. Candidates had to show understanding of the fact that since the first verb was a conditional clause: if + present simple tense, the following verb that is the main clause would have to be in the future tense in this context. Most candidates attempted this item correctly.

Item 9 - This item tested the correct use of quantifiers, especially the difference between ‘many’ and ‘much.’ This was generally well done by candidates.

Item 10 - This item tested whether candidates knew when capital letters would be required in the given sentence. Most candidates could identify that the proper noun

mary should start with a capital letter, along with the proper noun *england*. Most candidates attempted this item successfully.

Item 11 - In this item, candidates had to punctuate the given sentence properly. They had to use the comma after the word apples. The expected answer was: *Tim bought three apples, two oranges and one kiwi*. This was generally well done by candidates.

Item 12 - This item tested candidates' knowledge of negative structures in English. They had to show knowledge both of the syntax of negative structures in English and of the grammatical form of the verb that is required in such structures. Many candidates struggled with this item, with a variety of wrong answers visible in the work of candidates, such as

**The match not will be organised*

**The match will be not organised*

**The match do not be organised*

This is an aspect of English syntax where more work is warranted in the classroom.

Item 13 - This task assessed candidates' ability to link sentences correctly, using the conjunction '**as soon as**' appropriately. It was successfully attempted on the whole. Some candidates lost marks by not paying attention to the coherence of tenses in the sentence: **As soon as his father comes home, he would prepare dinner*.

Item 14 - This item tested the use of the simple past tense. It did not pose any difficulty to most candidates.

Item 15 – This item tested the candidates' ability to transform a sentence from indirect into direct speech using correct syntax, punctuation and grammar.

The expected answer was: *“Are you hungry?” asked the teacher* or *The teachers asked us, “Are you hungry?”*

This item posed difficulty to many candidates, including the best-performing ones. They seemed unaware of what was expected from them in this question. Common wrong answers included the following:

**The teacher asked them , “if they were hungry”*

** “We were hungry” asked the teacher*

** The teacher said that asked us if we were hungry.*

Question 2 – Basic Vocabulary

This question assesses knowledge of basic vocabulary items at this level. On the whole, this question was very well done, indicating that knowledge of basic vocabulary items has been acquired by most. Candidates are encouraged to read widely to build up their vocabulary, which will help them with all aspects of language.

Item 1 – His bag is too **heavy**. He cannot carry it alone.

Item 2 – There’s a wedding in my family. I need to buy some **new** clothes.

Item 3 – I am very **worried**. My father is ill.

Item 4 - My phone is broken. I cannot **make** calls.

Item 5 – James has been given **permission** to go home early.

Question 3 – Basic Reading Comprehension

Question 3 evaluated reading comprehension at an elementary level, precisely, the ability to locate information. An information sheet on an “Annual food & Fun day” at Summerhill Secondary School was set and overall, candidates fared very well, showing that the basic reading skill of literal understanding had been acquired. Students who resorted to indiscriminate lifting were penalized. In this kind of task, brief and precise answers are necessary. Most items were well answered by candidates.

The following items were less well done:

Item 5: At what time will the event start?

Expected answer: 10 00 / 10 00 am

Wrong answer: 1000 to 1600

Candidates are reminded of the importance of answering with precision and avoiding indiscriminate lifting.

Item 8: Which activity will be performed by Grade 9 students?

Expected answer: Concert

Wrong answers: Dancing/karaoke

Question 4 – Word Formation

In this question, candidates were assessed on word formation in context. A short passage about the Mauritian Sega was set, with words needing transformation given in brackets. This question was successfully attempted by many candidates but less able candidates faced difficulty when attempting item 3 and item 4.

Item 1 *It is often performed at family events or in public places.*

The present participle form of the verb ‘to perform’ was required here and this was wrongly attempted by weaker candidates who gave *performing as answer.

Item 2 *Sega songs are popular because they often talk about love.*

For item 2, candidates were required to transform the noun ‘popularity’ into the adjective ‘popular’. While the use of adjectives to describe nouns is a common transformation in English, many candidates opted for the adverb *popularly.

Item 3 *Women dancers wear traditional long skirts.*

The transformation of the noun tradition to the adjective traditional was expected here. This item posed difficulty to many candidates. Some struggled with the spelling of traditional, offering options like **traditionall* or **traditionel*. There were quite a number of candidates who instead transformed the noun into an adverb, offering **traditionally* as answer.

Item 4 *The men wear rolled-up trousers and colourful shirts.*

The adjective form of the noun colour was required here and this was generally well attempted by candidates. Both spellings colourful and colorful were accepted. However, some candidates offered **coloured* and **colourless* as answers, which could not be credited.

Item 5 *Sega is known for bringing people together.*

Most candidates fared well in this item, which required the verb *bring* to be transformed to *bringing*.

Question 5 – Error Hunt

In this exercise, candidates were required to correct the underlined mistakes. The grammatical items evaluated were: plural, articles, pronouns (personal), correct verb tense and preposition.

Item 1 The plural form (one of the most famous painters) was problematic to many candidates, even the best-performing ones. Many candidates failed to realise that in such structures, the plural form of the noun *painter* was required.

Item 2 Candidates had to realise that ‘a’ cannot be followed by a word starting with a vowel, and therefore ‘an’ was required here. This was well attempted by most candidates.

Item 3 Candidates had to realise that the pronoun should be in the masculine form. Enough grammatical clues had been provided previously in the text, and most candidates were able to give ‘*he*’ as the answer.

Item 4 For item 4, candidates were expected to give the right form of the past participle form of show, which is ‘*shown*’. The more archaic form ‘*showed*’ was also accepted. On the whole, this item was well attempted.

Item 5 Candidates had to find the correct preposition for item 5. Both ‘*in*’ and ‘*at*’ were acceptable here, and this was generally correctly answered.

Question 6 – Cloze Text

Question 6 is the open Cloze text - a higher-order reading task which evaluates candidates' overall knowledge of language (grammar, syntax and vocabulary). It requires candidates to use the given context and draw on their linguistic knowledge to make educated guesses of what word might be suitable in the given gaps. The question was generally well answered. However, it was noted that item 5 proved to be quite difficult for an important number of candidates.

Item 1 First, by sleeping outside, babies hear the sounds of nature.

A verb was required in this gap. Most candidates gave an appropriate answer.

Item 2 Thus, they sleep better.

Candidates had to offer the correct pronoun here. This item was very well attempted.

Item 3 Secondly, babies who sleep outside are/fall/get sick less often.

Several options were accepted provided the sentence was meaningful. This was another item where an important number of candidates had no difficulty in offering a suitable option.

Item 4 They are made to wear/keep a woollen hat on their head.

A verb was required in this gap. This item was generally well done.

Item 5 They are also covered with a thick blanket.

This item proved to be quite challenging to many candidates. The choice of the verb proposed, had to be in accordance with the preposition 'with'. This is why options such as 'enveloped,' 'wrapped' were not considered creditworthy.

Question 7 – Functional Writing

Question 7 is the basic writing task, with candidates required to write a short text of 50 -75 words on a functional task. They are essentially assessed on their ability to write using accurate G/S/P and showing good awareness of the audience and purpose. Given the word limit, candidates were not expected to elaborate on the given points but simply to address them clearly.

In this year's task, candidates were asked to write a goodbye card to their favourite teacher. The purpose and situation proved to be very straightforward for the majority of candidates. A successful answer had to address the following prompts:

- Why are you moving to another school?
- Why is he/she your favourite teacher?

- Your feelings about moving to a new school?
- How do your friends feel about you moving to another school?
- Promise to write to your teacher regularly.

For bullet point 1, candidates had to mention why they were moving to another school. This was achieved by most candidates. For example, they mentioned that their parents had got a new job, they were going to another country or they were being bullied.

For bullet point 2, candidates were asked why the teacher was their favourite. Many gave reasons like they were kind or funny to explain why they had a special liking for this teacher.

For bullet point 3, candidates had to write about their feelings. Many of them mentioned that they were sad or scared to be leaving school while others wrote about being excited at the new adventure.

For bullet point 4, candidates were required to write about how their friends felt about their moving to another school. Most candidates wrote that their friends were sad or disappointed.

Bullet point 5, required the candidates to promise their teacher to write to him or her regularly. This point was adequately addressed by most candidates.

Successful candidates addressed all prompts given. Excellent responses showed clear awareness of audience and purpose. All required points were developed. They used accurate grammar, spelling, punctuation and syntax. Vocabulary was appropriate and accurate. The overall task was organised and coherent. Less successful candidates demonstrated no real sense of audience and purpose. They did not cover most of the prompts or at best only addressed them briefly. They demonstrated poor linguistic abilities resulting in limited understanding. Those candidates also used simple and inaccurate vocabulary leading to disjointed writing.

The following samples illustrate the range of answers obtained this year. They are provided to give educators an idea of standards and of examiners' expectations.

Example 1

Dear Mr Ray

Next week, I am moving into a new school as my sister got a job in another city. I will miss you as you are my favourite teacher. I will miss your funny jokes and teaching. I am happy to move in the school as I will meet new people. My friends are sad about me leaving the school but I made a promise to them that I will visit them often and I promise that I will write to you regularly. Goodbye.

Yours

Maria

This response scores very highly as it addresses all the bullet points, uses accurate G/S/P and shows clear awareness of audience and purpose. It is noteworthy that such simple, straightforward responses can score very high marks.

Example 2

Dear Mr Kersley

I am writing you this letter to tell you that I am moving to a new school as my parents got a new job opportunity, so I am also moving to the south of the island. You are always my favourite teacher because you always encouraged me and never wanted me to give up on my studies and sport trainings. I am pretty happy as I can make new friends there but at the same time I am worried if the students there will not like me. My friends are sad as they will miss me so bad. I promise to write you regularly Sir.

Yours

Nirav

This response showed clear awareness of audience and purpose. However, the response had some occasional slips, which meant that this script could not be in the top band.

Example 3

Dear Mrs Hema

I am writting you to imform you that I am moving to a new school. My family and I are moving to a new place far from my school, so I will cannot continue to come here. I am writting you to say goodbye as you are my favourite teacher, you always understand me, when I told you of my problem at you home you listen to me and you have patience with me when I am studing. My friends are so sad as I am moving to another school. I promise to write to you regularly Mrs Hema.

Yours

Student, Gia

This is an average response. Although most key points are addressed, the language is too clumsy for this candidate to score highly. There are grammatical and spelling issues which at times even threaten to make the meaning unclear.

Example 4

Dear teacher

I will be write this letter for your and all of my friends. I explain you why I moving to another school. It because my parents go stay to another home, I was very sad because I lost you and my friends. You miss Sophie you are my favourite teacher. And my friends was so sad for me too. Miss Sophie I promise to write you regularly on my life and about my new school.

Yours

Loic Emilien

This is a very poor response. The given points are not properly addressed and the language used is insecure throughout.

Question 8 – Extended Reading Comprehension

This exercise evaluates learner's aptitude to read and understand a relatively long passage of about 600 words in English. A range of reading comprehension questions are set, including literal understanding, inferential understanding, knowledge of vocabulary in context, overall understanding of a passage and writer's craft. This year, a narrative passage was set.

Candidates generally performed satisfactorily on questions that called for a literal understanding of the passage. Weaker candidates had difficulty with questions assessing inference and questions that required a deeper level and interpretation of the text.

Candidates are reminded of the following:

- Lifting is permitted where the question does not ask for candidates to answer in their own words, but they will be penalised for excess information.
- Where candidates have been instructed to use their own words, they will be penalised for lifting from the text.
- Grammatical and spelling mistakes are not penalised if meaning and understanding are clear.

The following items are worthy of comments:

Item 1 This was a fairly direct question. The magic words that the narrator refers to were: "Let's go to the fancy fair!"

Candidates were not penalised if they wrote “fancy fair” only. However, some candidates wrote ‘magic fair’ instead of the correct answer and were consequently penalised.

Item 2 This question asked the candidates to give two reasons why the narrator felt less excited about going to the fancy fair.

There were two limbs to this answer, for 1 mark each.

Expected answers:

1. Tastes change over time.
2. We had started to feel the burden of age/ they were no longer young/ they were older/ they were adults now and their tastes had changed over time.

Some candidates wrote both limbs on the first line but were not penalised as only the first two answers are normally marked. Many candidates referred to the idea that the narrator had the responsibility of the family or that he was no longer free since he had children. These answers were rejected.

Item 3 This question required the candidate to mention the first thing the narrator heard when approaching the fancy fair. Many candidates fared well in this question.

The expected answer was *The murmur of the crowd/ the crowd*. Candidates were penalised if there was no reference to the crowd and if they wrote ‘murmur’ only.

Item 4 Candidates had to indicate what pulled the narrator to the fancy fair.

The expected answer was *The smell of the hot greasy cakes*.

This was a fairly well-attempted question. However, no marks were allotted if candidates mentioned the hot greasy cakes only. Emphasis had to be laid on the ‘smell’ of the cakes.

Item 5 This question required the candidate to explain why the narrator’s wife held Noah’s hand ‘tightly’.

The expected answer was *In order not to lose Noah amidst the crowd/ so that Noah does not walk away/ because Noah was an eager toddler*.

Several candidates were penalised for referring only to the number of people or the crowd present at the fair without referring to the idea that Noah could get lost.

Item 6 Candidates had to give the word which showed that it was Noah who led his parents in the direction of the aquarium.

The expected answer was ‘*steered*’ and this was well attempted on the whole. Some candidates were penalised for lifting the whole sentence without underlining/ highlighting the required word.

Item 7 Candidates had to explain fully what should be done to win a prize in the coin game. Two limbs were required to score the 2 marks.

A few candidates lifted complete sentences from the paragraph to answer the question. Lifting was acceptable if both limbs were present as long as the sentence did not include any excess information.

The two essential limbs for a full answer were:

Limb 1: A coin had to be dropped in the water.

Limb 2: It should/ought to land in one of the glasses.

Item 8 This item required candidates to describe a feeling, and was rather well tackled. Candidates came up with a variety of adjectives to describe Noah's love/ care/ affection for his sister.

Item 9 Two limbs were required to score the 2 marks on offer for this item.

1. He watched people try different games

2. He attempted some games himself.

Item 10: There were two limbs to this answer, for 2 marks.

The expected answers were:

1. It was getting dark

2. The children looked tired.

Item 11 The expected answer was '*Noah was nowhere to be found/ he realised that Noah was missing/ had disappeared.*

Candidates found many ways to express that idea but some merely copied from the passage, e.g. "Where's Noah?"

Item 12 The expected answer was *Noah had been there just a few seconds before / a short time ago.*

Candidates were required to specify the notion of a very short period of time for the mark to be allocated. No marks were allocated for specifying only the notion of distance or specific reference to time. E.g. 'he could not have gone very far/ he had been there just a few minutes before'.

Item 13 This item was found challenging by many candidates. They were expected to give a personal response to whether Noah could be described as 'an angel'. Candidates were free to agree or disagree with this opinion of Noah, as long as a defensible view was clearly expressed.

A wide variety of responses was accepted for this item, but still many candidates failed to come up with reasonable answers to this question.

Examples of rejected answers included:

He was only a four-year-old boy who was tired.

He was tired and sleepy.

Expected answers were along the following lines:

Yes. He looked innocent/ peaceful when he was sleeping.

Yes. He had not intentionally caused stress/ trouble/ worry to his parents/ he did not realise the consequences of his actions.

Yes. Every child/ baby/ toddler has the face of an angel.

No. Because he scares/ worries his parents.

No. He is naughty.

No. His mother calls him a rascal.

Item 14 The vocabulary question required candidates to explain various words in the context of the passage. Where candidates offered two different, contradictory answers to one same word, no mark was allocated. Spelling mistakes were tolerated as well as changes in verb tenses, so long as meaning was not in doubt. However, changes in word class, e.g. an adverb for an adjective, were rejected.

On the whole, this question continues to be challenging to candidates. Many struggle to find the meaning of words when used in context, or give definitions that are vague or approximate. Some candidates penalise themselves by giving more than one answer, often adding a wrong answer to an otherwise correct one. No credit is given to such responses.

Item 14 (i) Glanced: Acceptable answers included to *look quickly/hurriedly/briefly* or *to peek*. Many candidates lost marks by not being precise enough in their definitions, simply offering *to look* as an answer.

Item 14 (ii) Chubby: Acceptable answers for chubby included *fat* and *plump*. Common wrong answers included *cute*, *big*, and *little*.

Item 14 (iii) Speechless: Expected answers for speechless included *lost for words*, *did not know what to say*, *shocked*, and *having no words*. Common wrong answers were *scared*, *disappointed* or answers that kept the word *speech* in the attempted definitions.

Question 9 – Extended Writing

Question 9 is the extended writing task. Candidates were expected to write a composition of about 200-250 words out of a choice of three titles: a narrative, a descriptive and an argumentative topic. The following guidelines should be helpful to candidates:

- Candidates should pay attention to the key words in the essay titles so as to produce a relevant piece of writing.
- Candidates are advised to respect the word limit and to check their work thoroughly.
- The use of accurate and varied vocabulary is strongly encouraged.

- Candidates should be precise in the use of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Candidates are recommended to use a variety of sentence structures in their writing.
- Candidates are recommended to write in a logical and coherent manner
- Under no account should candidates reproduce material found elsewhere in the question paper while writing their essay.

Descriptive Writing

Even if the description was not so popular with candidates this year, those who attempted it were able to describe a scene in their house on the day of an important event in some detail. Scenes opted for ranged from birthday celebrations, graduation parties to marriage celebrations and most candidates structured their responses by starting with the preparations on the day and going up to the end of the celebrations. The best candidates managed to describe the scene in their house properly, creating the right atmosphere consistently. These responses depicted the full range of senses to give descriptions of their surroundings and made effective use of detail to bring the scene to life. One candidate wrote “All the guests were dressed to the nines in ethnic Indian wear and each of them brought wonderful gifts for the soon-to-be couple...” and another included how “the aroma of curry and spices from the kitchen could make anyone’s mouth water.” Vocabulary was often notable and included words like “gleefully,” “radiant,” and “appealingly.” Strong word choices were noted in the best essays. These included phrases/sentences like “The father escorted the shy and stunning bride down the aisle” “Solemn vows were exchanged...,” “Balloons drifted around aimlessly,” and “At the end of each seated row, vanilla scented candles hung from the extravagantly decorated branches.” Variety in sentence structure also contributed to consistent descriptions in the essays. One candidate wrote, “Some were still getting ready, others were busy decorating the remaining rooms while others still were making sure that all the 'jalebis' were ready in time..., “As the ceremony started, the incense sticks were burnt, the promises were made and two hearts were entwined forever.”

The following candidate responses illustrate examiners’ expectations in descriptive essays.

Example 1

A day of jubilation at home

The anticipation had been building for weeks and finally the day had arrived. The atmosphere in my house was electric, filled with excitement and joy. It was a day of great significance, an occasion that brought the entire family together - my graduation day.

As I descended the stairs that morning, I was greeted by a delightful sight. The living room had been transformed into a vibrant sea of colours. Balloons of all shapes and sizes adorned the walls, shimmering in various shades. Banners and streamers stretched from wall to wall, bearing congratulatory messages in bold, cheerful fonts. The room was bathed in warm and golden glow of sunlight streaming through the curtains, casting a radiant aura over the decorations.

The air was alive with the hum of activity. Relatives from near and far had gathered to celebrate this momentous occasion. Laughter and cheerful conversations echoed through the house as cousins, aunts and uncles caught up with each other. The tantalising aroma of home-cooked dishes wafted in from the kitchen, where my mother and grandmother were busy preparing a feast fit for a king.

As the time neared for the graduation ceremony, there was a sense of pride and accomplishment in the air. I could feel the love and support of my family, enveloping me like a warm embrace. Their smiles and encouraging words bolstered my confidence and made me even more eager to embark on this new chapter of my life.

In that moment, as I stood in the midst of my loved ones, I felt a profound sense of gratitude. It was not just my achievement; it was a celebration of the collective efforts and sacrifices made by my family. The day was a testament to the power of unity and love, and as we set off for the graduation ceremony, I knew I was stepping into the future with an unwavering support system behind me.

Such responses, which built an atmosphere by close description, the use of adjectives and made reference to the senses did well on this topic. The range and precision of the vocabulary used by the candidate was considered to be excellent: this is a Band One essay. The candidate focuses on what (s)he hears, what (s)he smells and what (s)he sees to describe the scene at home. Her/His feelings are expressed with clarity. The depiction of the decorations in the introductory paragraph triggers the consistent build-up of atmosphere that continues throughout the essay up to the point when the candidate writes about his/her own feelings about his/her achievements. The sentence structures and the correct tense give the essay a natural fluency which is very convincing. Vocabulary is certainly a strong point ('anticipation,' 'adorned,' 'streamers', 'momentous,' 'tantalising,' 'unwavering.')

There is a sense that the candidate is very comfortable while making use of such words. The images used are relevant and evocative (greeted by a delightful sight; congratulatory messages in bold, cheerful fonts; golden glow of sunlight; laughter and cheerful conversations) and these earn the candidate credit. Paragraphing is also very good in the way that it divides the

material after a good introduction and finishes with a definite and functional final paragraph. Spelling, especially quite a mature vocabulary, is notable with no slips.

Example 2

In the dead of winter, every year on 17 October, a chance to unite all the family members and relatives is presented. This time, it was my household's turn to arrange the lively and light-hearted event. Just a few days ago, carton boxes filled with decorations and silverware were strewn about the grand hall and now this place was magnificent.

Glass tables lined the floor of this enormous room with all the matching chairs and decorations creating an enchanting and cohesive display. The guests were dressed in their finest attires and attorned with mesmerising pieces of jewellery. The catering staff were also looking sharp in their suits while serving the beverages and food.

Soft music filled the background as the chatter and laughter of people were heard. This scene was slightly hectic with all the people having fun and enjoying their time but there was also a hint of serenity floating in the background. Like the sound of the rain while children are playing and having lunch at school.

The smell of the sweet custard filling the air tempted me to have dessert before dinner. The gathering did not only take place inside but also in the lush and green garden. The scent of the nocturnal flowers blooming was not something that one would miss unless one had a runny nose. Young children were playing in the recently trimmed grass while most of the adults were gazing upon the fish found in the fountains and ponds. A piece of art that fountain was...the marble was carved into intricate designs forming multiple mythical creatures.

When next year comes, I look forward to this evening again.

This is another strong response which made use of sensory descriptions. The candidate demonstrates quite sophisticated expressions and there are no errors. The text is logically and very effectively organised and the description is consistently sustained. The use of contrast as the candidate shifts from the hall strewn with cartons to the enormous decorated room is effective and enables the reader to easily picture the scene. The reader is fully engaged. Vocabulary is certainly a creditable point (*'silverware,' 'cohesive,' 'mesmerising,' 'serenity,' 'mythical'*) The candidate makes use of these words effectually. The images used paint clear pictures (*lively and light-hearted event; dressed in their finest attires; nocturnal flowers blooming; the marble was carved in intricate designs*) and these allow the candidate to achieve the highest level. The mature vocabulary in particular is noteworthy, with no slips. This is a Band One essay.

Example 3

Eid is a religious festival. It is celebrated by all Muslims around the world. It is usually celebrated with friends and family. Let's take a look about the scene in my house when Eid is near.

One day before Eid, in my house, it is my mother who is always rushing. You can see my house is full of people making preparation for the festival. You can see the house is full of clothes, ingredients to cook delicious sweets. The kitchen is the place which is loaded with people especially older people which are cooking.

On the day of Eid, after the prayer, you can see everyone is gather in the living room, talking to each other. Wishing each other 'Eid Mubarak.' You can smell the aroma of sweet cakes and 'briani' pulling everybody to eat. The living room is full of snacks like samosas, tea with milk, arabian sweets and others.

You can hear the laughing of uncles and fathers. My cousins and I dressed in beautiful dresses. You can also see grandparents gifting gifts my cousins and I. The atmosphere is always pleasant during Eid. It looks vivid. The atmosphere is always full of ambiance.

In my opinion, I think Eid is a beautiful festival which brings my family closer to each other. We enjoy together. Eid brings joys to eveyone in my house.

Punctuation is flawed, with sentence separation errors, as in the second paragraph. Some deviation is noted with the reference to what happens on the eve of Eid but this is not penalised as it is considered as part of the build-up to structure the description. Although clear paragraphing is a merit, the essay would certainly have gained from even more relevant details about the scene in the house on the day of the event. The occasional slips are also noted. It remains in Band 2 and towards the lower end of the band because of the simplicity and the content.

Example 4

Every year, my family and I celebrate our important event called 'Divali'. On this day, everyone wakes up at 4.00 a.m and take theirs showers and we pray to our god and we light up a lamp. After this, I switched on my speaker and starts playing some Divali songs. All my neighbours says 'Happy Divali' to each others. Some moments later, my mother went to the kitchen and start baking, cakes that will be distributed among us and relatives. My father and I started making the decorations while my brother has gone to buy firworks. The atmosphere became so much colourful and the sky was shining and everyone was enjoying it. There was plenty of noises.

We celebrated this event to protect ourselves from bad spirit. This was my best day ever. I never felt so excited. People continue to light up fireworks after midnight. The entire sky was lighting up.

Less successful responses relied too much on narrative while writing about their experience during events on the day, rather than describing the scene at home. These candidates overlooked the instruction given, that is to “**describe** “what you see and hear, the atmosphere, the people and what you feel.” The chosen event was described only briefly as a preface to a more narrative-based approach. The beginning of the essay clearly drives it away from a descriptive approach.

The language in these compositions was less specific with some repetition of expressions like ‘started baking’, ‘started preparing’, ‘started giving’ and ‘started to light up.’ There are, in addition, clear weaknesses in the spelling of very simple vocabulary, even with the simplest words, ‘theirs,’ ‘firworks.’ The control of tenses is a weakness in the essay and the difficulty to maintain a consistent sequence of tenses is noticeable – “I switched on my speaker and starts playing some Divali songs,” “my mother went to the kitchen and start baking,”

The approach limits the achievement of this essay to Band 4.

Argumentative writing

The essay on household chores was quite popular with candidates. There were a few really well-argued essays which clearly explained the reasons behind children having to do household chores while providing examples to support their arguments. The better responses conveyed a very balanced view on the importance of household chores and the number of chores that a child could be asked to do. Some candidates explored the importance of doing chores and its relationship with the proper development of the child. Most candidates managed to stay relevant. The best responses provided interesting examples which focused on the benefits of doing chores such as staying fit, learning to become independent, developing a sense of responsibility among others.

However, some candidates had difficulty with the argumentative essay. It was clear that these candidates had not prepared any plan before beginning to write and later realized that they did not have enough material to produce a sustained response. These essays resulted in very limited ideas and hence scored poorly. Weaker responses tended to list a few ideas rather than elaborate them. Such responses had repetitive ideas, usually rephrasing a single idea and showing little development. Such essays would have benefited from presenting only few arguments but in more depth.

The sample of essays below illustrates the standards expected by examiners for the argumentative writing task.

Example 1

Nowadays, there are many discussions and debates about whether children should learn to do house chores or not. Some people think that it is important while others do not agree.

According to me, it is necessary to learn to do house chores from childhood as children need to not depend fully on their parents as in case they lose their parents, they will not be able to cope and they might fall into depression. Through chores learning, a child can develop a sense of maturity, understanding and independence from an early age.

Moreover, I have noticed that nowadays children are addicted to mobile phones and this is dangerous for their mental and physical health. By doing some house chores, they will take a break from their phones and they will get some exercise. The child can also become more responsible and conscious of his actions. They will not make a mess in the house as they know that they will have to clean it by themselves.

However, it should be noted that children should only do a moderate amount of work and not do dangerous chores like cooking food or ironing clothes. The child should not be beaten, scolded or forced to do chores. Parents should let the child grow at their own pace and be friendly with them. It is better if the parents explain the importance of doing chores to the children.

In conclusion, I think that it is a good thing if a child does house chores but they should be given easy tasks as they are not ready yet to do difficult and complicated tasks.

The better candidates tackled this title sensibly and offered their personal opinions. They provided examples before considering the opposing view and gave a solid conclusion by reinstating their own position. The arguments are presented clearly in a direct and accurate language. Punctuation and organised paragraphs allow a smooth reading of the essay. There is hardly any mistake; the misspelling of *conscious is noted but overall, this is an effortless piece of writing with a good flow of ideas. Conjunctions such as 'moreover', 'however' at the beginning of paragraphs clearly show the transition of ideas from one side to another. Expressions like 'according to me', 'in conclusion' bring out the clarity in organization of ideas. The punctuation and sentence structure would benefit from a little more variation for effect. It is a good example of how an argumentative essay, can gain a Band 1 without using a complex language but by being competent in every aspect.

Example 2

In my opinion, children should learn to do chores e.g washing the dishes, sweeping the floor etc. They should know how to be more helpful with their parents so that one day they could depend on themselves when they will have their own house with responsibility. Having chores is also being responsible and responsible is also being independent so that they could do things by themselves when their parent wont be around. Both Girls and Boys should know how depend on themselves and has their own chores in the house to help their parents to clean the house without taking hours. Every parents should learn their children how to do chores so that when they grow up, they would thanked their parent for taughting them how to do house chores because when they will have their own house, family and responsible, they will be the one doing the chores. This must go to generation from generation so that every children become responsible.

This essay has no paragraphing but does not, at any point cloud the stages of the argument. The essay does not have much elaboration, and is more like a list of arguments. Many ideas, such as children learn responsibility through house chores, is repeated. The language in the essay is quite simple, entails multiple errors and the vocabulary is far from ambitious. Punctuation mistakes such as “Both Boys and Girls”, spelling mistakes such as “responsability” and verb forms such as “taughting” make the language problematic. The content remains elementary creating poor interest for the reader. This essay is therefore at the bottom of Band 3.

Example 3

This was important for a children to do the many house chores example washing the dishes, sweepinging the floor. This can help the parents because the parents was travel any time of the week and you was go to school 8:00 and go back to 2:30 and the parent was 5:00 and go back to 18:00. And you arrived to your home you go to sleep, play football and watch tiktok. I am sure you can do the chores because who was borrow. Just imagine you finish the house chores and you can practise your activity and your parent back home the can relax watch a film to you in a smile my friend. Imagine a invite was coming to you do a surprise and the people enter in the house they were see many chores not to do. The people his talk this in another personne and the face of the family was not inapropriate and the another said that this famiy was so dirty. This parents was not appropriate for the children because was not to do the chores in the house and the responsible in this case was the parents. Finally this is my oppion to this question and I talk to his for many children to you do the home chores

Weaker candidates wrote essays such as the above, featuring a list of undeveloped ideas, with confused tenses, an overuse of simple grammatical forms, simple sentences and inaccurate vocabulary. Many spelling mistakes such as “*inapropriate*”, “*responsible*” were also noted. Not only is the language problematic but also the writing style is very conversational. “...your parents can relax watch a film talk to you in a smile my friend...”

The accuracy is only occasional and this clouds the content. The frequent errors make it difficult for the reader to follow the sequence of events. While the vocabulary is simple, it is still subject to error and expressions seem to be translated from creole. “Imagine a invite was coming to you....”

The poor relevance, serious language errors and inaccuracies in vocabulary limit the achievement of this essay to Band 5.

Narrative Writing

Generally, the narrative task was the most popular option with candidates. This year, candidates were asked to write a story based on the line ‘I had never been so disappointed...’

The best candidates produced intricate plots, making use of very precise G/S/P and accurate vocabulary. They used a range of sentence types to sustain the reader’s interest throughout and showed awareness of the need to use narrative techniques. Weaker candidates, nonetheless, found it challenging to develop a plot and used very flawed language throughout. Wrong spelling and tenses and sentence separation problems were predominantly evident in these scripts. The following candidate responses exemplify examiners’ expectations in narrative essays.

Example 1

There I was, in the restaurant with my parents. The noise of the chatters annoyed me. My vision was blurry from the horrible news I had been announced a while ago. It was the first term’s results day of grade 2. I was announced that I had been ranked 9th in the class! My seven year old self was so disappointed. After a winning streak of always being the class topper back in grade 1, I was 9th? I was sulking and upset. My dad kept teasing me about my rank but I was really not in the mood for his dad jokes. I sat in the restaurant, refusing to eat the good food because I did not deserve it. Eventually, mom made me give into the temptation of the chocolate milkshake sitting in front of my face. With a frown, I took a sip. “I’m very disappointed with myself,” I said on our way home. “I need to study more.” “Honey, your grades are fine, don’t obsess over it,” said my mom, comforting me. But I did not back down. I had never been so disappointed. Back home, I sat down with my math textbook, reading and studying. There was no way I was going to be in top 10 again. I needed the top 3.

This is a good example of a complex and sophisticated piece of writing. It is indisputably a Band 1 essay. The candidate has produced an intricate plot and the language is principally very accurate throughout. The vocabulary used is noteworthy (*the noise of the chatters annoyed me, vision was blurry, winning streak, my seven year old self was so disappointed, with a frown I took a sip* etc.). The candidate has made use of a variety of sentence structures and the coherence in the ideas is striking.

Example 2

I had never been so disappointed in my entire life. I never thought someone this dear to me could accuse me of such horrendous thing. The one person who I once considered my best friend left me completely shattered and devastated. I was in agony after he blamed for the death of our puppy that we bought together with our own money. He was bashing at me through text messages telling me I was a jerk for leaving the front gate opened. At first I did not get by what he meant, so I told him to get straight to the point. I told him to calm down first and that we should talk about it in person. I told him to come at my house. He later came and I once again asked him to calm down and get straight to the point. What he said next left me completely flabbergasted. I stared at him processing at what he just said. Apparently, the last time I was at his place, I had left the front gate open and the puppy we just bought ran out and had an accident. I could not process anything and the next thing I knew was him calling me names. The air was filled with melancholy. I knew for sure I was not the one who left the gate opened so I told him to check the cctv fotage as he had installed cameras. I kicked him out of the house still in shock after he just accused me for the puppy I cherished with love. Later that day, I got a call from him pleading for forgiveness as I was not at fault and I had indeed closed the gates. He told me that the mailman was the one who left the door opened. I am still very disappointed and he keeps beggin for forgiveness. I have not spoken to him for the past three days as I need time to get over this event.

This response lacks sophistication. The content is relevant. While there is an attempt at complexity, the plot resonates more with a series of events. The vocabulary used is generally precise (shattered, flabbergasted, cherished, pleading, etc...) but punctuation and spelling mistakes are frequent. The candidate clearly has issues with the past perfect tense. Therefore, this response scores well, but cannot be awarded the best marks.

Example 3

I had never been so disappointed because my mother do not go at Canada to get a jobs. Yesterday my mom came to me and told me "Makiel, I have new job." I am very excited about this, but my mother don't have a CV to give the director. My mother was very sad but I tell to my mom "you can do it" it her dream to get a job at Canada. My mother phone ring he is my father. My father told to my mom "I arrived in a few second Okay". My dad take on in the house and he ate the dinner, He said to my mom "told about your job" My mother cry because her doesn't have a cv. I said to me "don't believe this your dream to go at Canada do it mom" I am encourage my mom to do it because I am very sad because she cry. Her dreams is to go at Canada and to a new life at this contry. The of my mom call this is the director of HR PRO his told to my mom "come at Ebene I have a big give for, tomorrow at 1000 p.m. I will wait for you goodbye. My mother was very happy about this.

Although there is a relevant storyline in this answer, language mistakes are too frequent. There are many serious errors which make meaning unclear. The sentences are mostly simple and the vocabulary contains lots of inaccuracies. The narratives are sketchy and the events appear to be random. Mistakes are frequent– from punctuation, sentence separation to spelling mistakes. Consequently, this response is towards the lower end of the mark spectrum.

Question 10 (Literature)

In this year's session, a choice between poetry and prose was set. The poetry question was based on William Blake's *A Poison Tree* and was a popular choice with candidates. The prose question was based on an extract of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both options sought to address candidates' ability to identify common literary devices and show an understanding of the functions of these devices. Candidates were also required to show an understanding of figurative language, and show their ability to analyse a literary extract.

Option A (Poetry)

In this component, candidates were tested on their knowledge and ability to appreciate a poem and demonstrate analytical skills. Other skills that were assessed included showing awareness of message, making links between text and life experiences, analyzing character, plot, themes and expressing sensitivity to language and the use of stylistic devices.

Generally, candidates did well on the tasks asking them to identify literary devices and to provide another example of a particular literary device. Questions requiring an understanding of parts of the poem were also well answered. The last question, asking for a personal interpretation of the message of the poem, supported by close reference to the poem, was well-attempted by only a small number of candidates.

Item 1: Generally, well answered. Candidates had little difficulty identifying the rhyming words "night and bright"

Item 2 (a): Most of the candidates had no difficulty identifying that the narrative voice used in the poem was the first-person narrative.

Item 2 (b): On the whole candidates correctly identified that the evidence for the first-person narrative was any quote including "my" and "I":

"I was angry with my friend"

"I told my wrath , my wrath did end"

"I was angry with my foe"

"I told it not, my wrath did grow"

Item 3 (a) and (b): This item required candidates to recognise an example of metaphor and to give an example of another metaphor used in the poem. A good number of candidates managed to recognize that "And I watered it in fears" was the correct answer for item 3(a) and could provide another example from the list below:

"And I sunned it with Smiles"

"Till it bore an apple bright"

"When the night had veiled the pole"

Item 4 (i) and (ii)

This item required explanations or direct paraphrasing of the given line.

(i) “ I told it not, my wrath did grow.”

Many candidates managed to display an understanding of the line and address the key ideas that poet did not share/ voice out/discuss/ express his anger with his enemy and therefore, his anger grew. However, some candidates explained only one part of the question.

(ii) “My foe outstretched beneath the tree.”

Candidates struggled in this part of the question and had difficulty in demonstrating understanding of the given lines. Credit was given to candidates who managed to explain that the enemy lay dead under the tree.

Item 5: This item asked candidates to elaborate on their own understanding of the main message of the poem and offer a personal interpretation. Interpretations that showed understanding of the poem, provided evidence of analysis, were insightful and well supported with close reference to the poem earned the 3 marks.

Possible interpretations of this poem included but were not limited to:

- anger/ resentment/ jealousy
- lack of honesty/ grudge/ insecurity/ frustration
- failed friendship/ deceit/ hypocrisy/ revenge

A few samples to illustrate the range of answers obtained this year are given below. These samples should provide educators with an idea of standards and of examiners' expectations.

Example 1

This poem is about the poet's growing this poison tree, that is his wrath by saying "my wrath did grow and it grew both day and night." The poem depicts how anger can be fueled and harm friendship as a friend can turn into a foe. "I was angry with my friend" became "I was angry with my foe." Anger could ruin his morals as it is said that the poet was glad to see his foe outstretched beneath the poison tree.

This piece of work scores 3 marks as the candidate shows a clear understanding of the poem. There is evidence of analysis and the answer is well supported with close reference to the poem.

Example 2

It is about extreme anger. It is about being angry at someone. It is about being angry for so long and finally being able to let that anger go. " in the morning glad I see; My foe outstretched beneath the tree." Or it could be about finally defeating an enemy that had been angering you for so long. The narrator was very at someone and day and night, that anger grew even more that finally he defeated his enemy.

This sample shows some evidence of understanding of the poem and provides some support from the poem. The candidate recognizes the key idea of being angry with the enemy. However, there is not enough analysis for this to warrant the best marks.

Example 3

The narrator was describing how angry he was at his enemy and what he did to calm himself.

In this response, the candidate shows a very sketchy and literal understanding of the poem. There is no attempt at going beyond the literal and analysing the poem, which results in the candidate scoring very low marks.

Example 4

This poem is about the narrator and his tree. The narrator was afraid of creatures like birds, that might come and eat his fruit. " And I watered it in fears", " till it bore an apple bright", " And he knew that it was mine.

This response shows no understanding of the poem and is insufficient to meet the criteria for 1 mark.

Option B (Prose)

The prose extract was from Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. Candidates were assessed on their ability to identify literary devices in MCQs and to give other examples/ pieces of evidence to show their understanding of literary devices. Candidates were also tested on their understanding of the extract and their ability to express their opinion of characters and situation within its context.

Items 1 and 2

Generally, candidates did well in the task of identifying specific literary devices (in the present exercise the narrative voice and a metaphor).

Item 3 This item assessed understanding of the following lines:

- (i) "Scout has been reading ever since she was born"

Weaker candidates merely paraphrased/ copied the sentence while abler ones correctly used the notion of time to express the idea conveyed, i.e. that she has been reading from **a very young age**.

- (ii) "You look right puny for nearly seven."

Candidates were expected to express their interpretation in terms of size, e.g.

"You appear quite small/ thin and weak for someone who is about to turn seven"

Candidates were not allotted the mark if they referred to Dill's age only.

- (iii) "Dill was a curious sight..."

A wide variety of suitable adjectives was accepted for this item, among which the following:

Dill was strange/ unusual/ weird/ out of the ordinary/ arousing attention or interest/ intriguing/ odd-looking/ unique.

Candidates who merely described him as 'curious' were not awarded the mark.

Item 4

This item required candidates to elaborate on their understanding of the extract, provide an informed personal opinion with close reference/ quotes from the extract to support their answer.

The focus should be on the personality/ character traits. However, key ideas from the extract could include physical traits, but the character traits were essential for full marks.

Relevant include (but are not limited to) these aspects of Dill's character portrayal.

- A nearly seven-year-old boy with a tiny frame but with an active imagination.
- Naïve/ impressionable/ independent observer

- Friendly/ sociable/ boastful
- A bit odd/ eccentric
- All these should be supported by quotes or close references to the extract.

The best answers showed a full understanding of the extract, with evidence of analysis that shows the candidate's ability to give an insightful response, with answers well supported by close reference to the extract.

Here are a few samples that will illustrate the range of answers.

Example 1

Dill is naïve and innocent. He is slightly unusual but has his own way of living his life. He is in his own little. As seen here: "we found someone sitting and looking at us." He has pride and wants to let everyone know he can read, " I can read." He is full of energy and sometimes the way in which he reacts is unexpected, " his laugh was sudden and joyful." He is also attentive to detail when he described Dracula to Jem, making him come to the conclusion that the show was better than the book. Finally, Dill is also mysterious as he hasn't mentioned anything about his father yet. He has secrets of his own.

The above extract gives an insightful response to the question, with quotes and close references that support the opinion being made. There is a clear understanding and analysis of Dill's character and an informed opinion is clearly expressed. This analysis obtained maximum marks.

Example 2

Dill is thoughtful and caring as he uses his abilities to help others, like reading. He is not offended when people criticize him. Although Jem told him that he was short for someone who is almost seven, Dill is not angry. Dill does not care about money as he used the five dollars given to him to go to the movies twenty times

This response includes character traits but while the candidate shows some understanding and analysis, the limited use of the extract for reference makes this response weaker. Had there been closer references to the text to support the analysis being made, the candidate would have scored full marks. However, since this wasn't done, full credit could not be given to this response.

Example 3

Dill is Miss Rachel Haverford's nephew. He likes to watch movies; he is a fan of Dracula and is someone that loves to tell stories.

This response gives a literal meaning of the extract, with a limited response and no evidence of analysis or support from the extract.

Example 4

Dill was a curious sight with blue linen shorts buttoned to his shirt, and with white hair. His blue eyes would change, his laugh was sudden and joyful. He often tugged at a lock of hair on his forehead.

The candidate merely copies from the extract, offering no response or analysis. No credit could be given to a response of this type.