



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

**MAURITIUS
EXAMINATIONS
SYNDICATE**

**NCE 2021-2022
GRADE 9
ENGLISH**

Subject code: N500

EXAMINERS' REPORT

July 2023

Key Messages

- Most candidates have achieved the required levels when it comes to basic vocabulary, basic grammar, basic reading and basic writing.
- Candidates are advised to read widely and use more English in their day to day communication to build up their vocabulary in English.
- In Grammar, candidates are still having difficulty with the following:
 - Use of the do-support (**Raj did not went to the ...*)
 - Subject-verb agreement (** Everyone are quiet today.*)
 - The past tense of irregular verbs (e.g. *teach/ taught*)
 - Transforming declarative sentences into interrogatives and negatives properly.
 - Transforming sentences to and from the active/passive voice
- In Reading Comprehension,
 - Questions requiring literal understanding are successfully attempted.
 - Questions assessing higher-order reading skills like making inferences, offering personal responses and guessing the meaning of words in context are generally found challenging by many.
- In Writing,
 - candidates are advised to be attentive to their use of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
 - sentence separation remains a challenge for weaker candidates.
 - narrative essays require candidates to develop a storyline and use varied sentence structures and a wide-ranging vocabulary to sustain the reader's interest. The best candidates show evidence of narrative techniques (flashback, cliffhangers, attention to character development, setting etc.). Candidates should avoid only giving a series of events, with no attempt at creating any effect for the reader.
 - descriptive essays require candidates to show a very wide range of vocabulary to create an atmosphere. Far too often narrative essays were produced instead of descriptive ones. The best candidates are able to use sensory language to describe what they see, hear, smell, touch and taste, to create vivid atmospheres consistently.

- argumentative essays require relevant information to be organised coherently and ideas need to flow logically. Simply listing ideas without any organisation cannot be given much credit.
- For the literature component,
 - questions requiring candidates to identify literary devices were well answered.
 - questions requiring analysis, with relevant reference from the given extract, were found challenging by many candidates.

General Comments

The NCE English assessment evaluates the linguistic competencies of candidates in English after Grade 9 and Grade 9+. The skills and competencies are those spelt out in the National Curriculum Framework and in the Teaching and Learning Syllabus. The tasks set assess reading comprehension, writing, grammar and literary appreciation.

Performance on the NCE English Assessment in 2021-2022 was, on the whole, very satisfactory. Approximately 16,000 candidates sat for the assessment, including about 2,000 candidates from the Extended Stream. The pass rate was 81.3% and 13.8% of candidates managed to achieve the highest grade.

Candidates did well on both reading tasks (Question 4 and Question 8), especially when dealing with literal understanding and explicit location of information. Higher order reading skills like inference and vocabulary in context were successfully tackled by stronger candidates.

When it comes to writing, the functional writing task (Question 7) was better done than the extended writing task. Weaker candidates are encouraged to not leave scripts blank and to at least attempt to respond the prompts given in this question. For the extended writing task, the narrative essay was the most popular choice, and was generally well done. The best candidates are able to have well-developed plots and write using accurate G/S/P and a variety of sentence structures. They are also able to use narrative devices like flashbacks, cliffhangers and direct speech effectively. Some very good examples of descriptive essays were seen this year. Candidates who wrote good descriptive essays were able to use sensory language to create an atmosphere consistently. They also avoided the trap of falling into a narrative. Nevertheless, the advice is still that descriptive essays should be tackled by candidates who have a wide vocabulary and can use figurative language to describe a scene vividly and create an atmosphere consistently.

It is also worth noting that good progress was noted on the literary appreciation task. Candidates performed well on tasks requiring identification of stylistic devices and their effects. Stronger candidates were also able to go beyond literal understanding of the poem or the prose passage and offer good analysis of the writing.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1 – Basic Grammar

Question 1 tests an array of basic grammatical concepts in English. The grammatical items evaluated were pronouns (personal), the use of tenses (simple present and simple past) prepositions, correct verb forms, comparisons, quantifiers, use of the apostrophe, negative/interrogative structures, punctuation, use of conjunctions, the active/passive voice and subject/verb agreement. The best-done items were those dealing with personal pronouns and prepositions which are frequently used. Candidates faced more difficulty with items assessing the accurate verb form, subject-verb agreement and transforming sentences into the interrogative form.

Item 1 - The question on preposition was mostly well-attempted by the candidates. They understood that the required preposition (*The children go to a school in Vacoas*) needed to indicate direction or destination. Some candidates wrongly gave 'at' as the answer, probably due to the influence of French.

Item 2 - The question on personal pronouns was well tackled by the majority of candidates. The pronoun 'she' for 'My sister' was correctly used in most cases.

Item 3 - Some candidates had difficulty choosing the right option for this question. The expected answer was (*Jimmy could not buy the book.*) Weaker candidates had difficulty understanding that modal verbs are followed by a bare infinitive and 'bought' was a common wrong answer.

Item 4 - This item tested the coherence of tenses, and was generally well-attempted. Candidates were able to make out that the required answer had to be in the present tense given that the other verb in the sentence was in the present tense.

Item 5 - Some candidates did not realise that the superlative degree of comparison was needed here. A common incorrect answer was "higher" instead of "highest".

Item 6- This item tested candidates' knowledge of the use of the apostrophe, more specifically whether they knew how to distinguish between its use in the singular and in the plural. This proved to be challenging to a noticeable number of candidates.

Item 7- This item tested the correct use of quantifiers, especially the difference between 'many' and 'much.' This was generally well done by candidates.

Item 8 - 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 negative structures. An important number of candidates offered option D as an answer (* *The policeman did not saw anyone at the scene*), failing to see that the verb form was wrong in this negative structure.

Item 9 - Many candidates were unable to apply the subject-verb agreement rule here, that is, if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular too. The correct answer was (*The quality of these oranges is good*). Candidates often make a proximity error in such cases, making the verb agree with the closest noun rather than its subject. In this case, the fact that *oranges* was next to the verb made some candidates think that the verb had to be in the plural, when in fact the subject of the verb was *quality*.

Item 10 - Most candidates attempted this item successfully. Weaker candidates sometimes underlined only one correct word, leading to a loss of marks.

Item 11 - In this task, candidates were asked to separate sentences, add capital letters and full stops where required. It was an elementary task that most candidates correctly accomplished. A few candidates had difficulty knowing where to separate the sentences and often omitted the full stop and the capital between the two sentences, using a comma instead between the sentences, as shown in the example below:

**We went in the car, we drove all the way to the beach.*

Item 12 - In item 12, candidates had to punctuate the given sentence properly. They had to use the capital letter for *why* and add the interrogation mark at the end. The expected answer was: *Why did you eat the ice-cream?* This was generally well done by candidates.

Item 13 - This task assessed candidates' ability to link sentences correctly, using the conjunction 'because' appropriately. Most Candidates succeeded in writing a meaningful sentence, as shown below:

E.g. The guests left early because the weather was not good.

Because the weather was not good, the guests left early.

It was noted that when it comes to the positioning of conjunctions and use of personal pronouns, low performing candidates struggled in producing meaningful sentences.

E.g. **The guests left early Because the weather was not good.*

**The weather was not good because the guests left early.*

Item 14 In item 14, candidates had to transform the given sentence in the interrogative form. The expected answer was: *Did Sara ask her mother for the shopping list?* This item required 3 transformations. Wrong transformation and wrong punctuation were penalized, as shown below:

**Did Sara ask edher mother for the shopping list.*

***Did Sara ask her mother for the shopping list?**

**Has Sara asked her mother for the shopping list?*

Candidates faced a number of difficulties here. Many candidates were unfamiliar with the correct verb form and punctuation and gave answers like **Where is the shopping list? Sara asked her mother.* It was also noted that even high-performing candidates struggled to score full marks on this item, which demonstrates that transforming interrogative sentences in English is an area that candidates struggle with.

Item 15 Item 15 tested the candidates' ability to transform a sentence from the passive to the active Voice using correct syntax and grammar.

The expected answer was: *The Principal punished the pupils.*

Examples of wrong syntax: **By the Principal, the pupils were punished.*

Example of wrong verb form: **The Principal punish the pupils, *the Principal punishes the pupils, The Principal will punish the pupils.*

Question 2 – Basic Vocabulary

This question assesses knowledge of basic vocabulary items at this level. In general, this question was very well done, indicating that knowledge of basic vocabulary items has been acquired by most.

The best-done items were:

Item 1 - I did not have time for **breakfast** when I woke up this morning.

Item 3 - The letter has been sent to my home **address**.

Item 4 - It was a very **entertaining** film. We all enjoyed it.

Item 5 - His parents **insisted** that he stop using his mobile phone while studying.

Item 2 proved to be challenging for some candidates, indicating that *culprit* is a word that is not generally known to some candidates.

E.g. *As the burglary was caught on camera, the **culprits** were easily caught.*

Question 3 – Basic Reading Comprehension

Question 3 evaluated reading comprehension at an elementary level, precisely, the ability to locate information. An information sheet on Rosa Parks, the famous American Civil Rights campaigner, was set and overall, candidates performed very well, with most candidates showing that the basic reading skill of literal understanding had been acquired.

It was however noted that few who resorted to indiscriminate lifting were penalized. In this kind of task, the importance of brief and precise answers is necessary. Most items were mostly well answered by candidates.

The following items were less well done:

Item 4: Whom did Rosa Parks marry?

Expected answer: Raymond Parks.

Wrong answer: Her Husband/ Raymond, her husband

Item 8: Why was Rosa asked to give up her seat?

Expected answer: A white man got on the bus.

Wrong answers: There was no more place/seat on the bus/ She had paid for her ticket.

Item 9: What reason did Rosa give for not paying the fine?

Expected answer: The law was wrong and (not her behaviour).

Wrong answers: She refused to pay a fine/ she did not obey.

Question 4 – Word Formation

This question assessed word formation in context. A short passage about Stonehenge 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 1 and item 3.

Item 1 *Some people think it was built by giants.*

The past participle form of the verb to build was required here and this was wrongly attempted by weaker candidates who gave **builded* as answer.

Item 2 *Whoever the builders were, they were certainly very clever!*

For item 2, candidates were required to transform the adjective *certain* into the adverb *certainly*. This is a common transformation in English but spelling mistakes were noted. Some candidates wrongly spelt the word, *certainly* and gave answers such as **certeinly*.

Item 3 *Stonehenge was constructed for religious purposes.*

The transformation of the noun *religion* to the adjective *religious* was expected here. This item seemed to pose difficulty to many candidates. Some struggled with the spelling of *religious*, offering options like **religios/ religeous* and many candidates wrote meaningless words like **religional*.

Item 4 *Many parts of Stonehenge have fallen down or are now missing.*

The adjective form of the verb to miss was required here and this was generally well attempted by candidates.

Item 5 *Nevertheless, Stonehenge remains so amazing that every year, more than a million people come to see it from all over the world!*

Most candidates fared well in this item; although a common wrong item was **amazed*.

Question 5 – Error Hunt

Question 5 evaluated candidates' aptitude to deal with grammar and spelling in context. A short text comprising of grammatical and spelling mistakes was set. The mistakes were already identified (through underlining) and candidates were required to correct them. This question was generally well answered. Nevertheless, it was noted that item 4 posed difficulty to an important number of candidates in this task.

Item 1 *His large forehead and large eyes was typical of his people.*

The plural form of the past participle of the verb to be was required for gap 1 and it was successfully attempted. Most candidates were able to do the subject-verb agreement successfully.

Item 2 *It is said that Ethiopians like him have Arab and African blood flowing through there veins.*

This item tested whether candidates would be able to identify the correct spelling if *their*. Candidates often often have difficulty distinguishing between *there* and there but most candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

Item 3 *Alem's father was a man which tried to smile as much as he could.*

The relative pronoun 'who' or 'that' was required for item 3 and it was the best-done item for this question.

Item 4 *Most of the time, however, he took life siriously.*

Candidates had to correct the spelling mistake and the adverb 'seriously' was required for gap 4. However, it was wrongly attempted by weaker candidates. Many candidates wrote 'seriosly, sireaously'. This was the most problematic item in this question.

Item 5 *Alem thought that his father was too often loss in his thoughts.*

This item required candidates to use the correct past participle of the verb to lose and many low achievers wrote '*lossing*' and '**loossed*'

Question 6 – Cloze Text

Question 6 is the open Cloze text - a higher order reading task which assesses 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.

Many candidates found this task challenging. Items 1, 2 and 3, in particular, were found difficult by candidates, with only about half of the cohort managing to find a suitable word for these gaps.

Item 1 People travel for different **reasons**, such as business or visiting family and friends.

A noun was required in this gap. Most candidates offered a suitable answer.

Item 2 Many people go on vacation because they want a **break** from their everyday lives.

Candidates had to offer a noun here and a number of options were possible. This item was generally well attempted.

Item 3 In winter, people living in cold countries often go to other countries because they want to experience a **warmer/ different** climate.

A number of options were accepted provided they conveyed a comparison/ contrast to cold countries. This was another item where an important number of candidates had difficulty offering a plausible option.

Item 4 Many enjoy **learning** about other cultures and tasting new cuisines.

A wide range of answers were acceptable here and this item was generally well done

Item 5 Since the late 1900s, tourism has grown and become an **important** part of economies all over the world.

This item proved to be challenging to many candidates. Candidates proposed words which did not start with a vowel as they overlooked the article 'an'. Weaker candidates did not understand the context and proposed irrelevant words such as *attractive* or *big*.

Question 7 – Functional Writing

Question 7 is the basic writing task, with candidates requiring 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 section, candidates were asked to write a letter to plan an event. They had to plan a trip to the cinema with their friends. The purpose and situation proved to be very straightforward for the majority of candidates. A successful answer had to address the following prompts:

- Which film are you going to watch?
- At what time will the film start?
- Who will be coming?
- How will you go there?
- What should each of you bring?

For bullet point 1, it was necessary to mention the film they were going to watch. This was achieved by most candidates. They mentioned the films such as *Smile*, *Avengers*, *Jurassic world*, *Minions*, *Don Returns*, *Scream* among others.

For bullet point 2, candidates were asked about the time the film will start. Many gave a specific time thereby fulfilling the requirement.

For bullet point 3, candidates had to include who will be coming. Most of them mentioned their parents, friends, relatives and siblings.

For bullet point 4, candidates were required to write about how they will reach their destination. Most successful candidates wrote that they would go by car, taxi, metro or bus.

Bullet 5, required the candidates to be specific about what should each of them bring. Most wrote that they should bring *money for tickets, or food, or sweets, chocolates, drinks*.

Successful candidates addressed all prompts given. Excellent responses showed clear awareness of audience and purpose. All required points were developed. Candidates used very 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 friends

Im planning to go to the cinema and would like to invite you guys. I picked a movie which is action packed. We will be watching the movie 'Don Returns'. We will go there at 10am which is the time the movie starts. A couple of my family members will also be coming with us. We will go there by taxi. You guys should bring your own money for tickets and snacks.

Farewell!

Yours

This response scores very highly (Band 1) as it addresses all the bullet points, uses accurate G/S/P and shows clear awareness of audience and purpose. The minor mistakes do not impact on the overall readability of the writing. It is noteworthy that such simple, straightforward responses can score very high marks.

Example 2

Dear friends

I hope all of you are enjoying your vacation. I am writing this letter to inform you that i was planning to go to the cinema with you, my friends, since we wanted to watch the new movie 'minions'. The movie will start at six o'clock. It will be only among us. I was thinking that i will asked my parents to drop us at the cinema. We will go by car since there are only four of us. Each one of you will have to bring a snack. I hoped you will reply to me soon!

Yours

Best friend, sara

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, hence in Band 2.

Example 3

Dear friends

I plan to go the cinema with you. We will go to watch a film name is Ek villain the movie will start in 8pm sharp. they will be have all the friend. and we will go by my car I will come to pick you. I will give you all a trits and if you to bring some drink and I will bring sandwich.

Yours

Friend, Ayesha.

This is an average response. Although the key points are addressed, the English is far too insecure for this candidate to score highly. There are grammatical and spelling issues which at times even threaten to make the meaning unclear. This response fits into Band 3.

Example 4

Dear friends

I raets this lette to planning a plan to go to the cinema were can watch film The door. me and my sisters will come. The will start at 07:45 p.m on 17/ 09/22. Were can bring pizza. I will sarah to come and sam.

Yours

This is a very poor response. The given points are not properly addressed and the language used is insecure throughout. This response was in Band 4.

Question 8 – Extended Reading Comprehension

This exercise assesses learner’s ability 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, chosen and adapted from “The Full Cupboard of life” by Alexander McCall Smith.

Candidates generally performed adequately on questions that called for a literal understanding of the passage. The difficulty for weaker candidates arose when inference and questions that required a deeper level and interpretation of the text.

- Candidates are reminded of the following:
 - Lifting is permitted where it is specifically asked for, 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 made clear.

The following items are worthy of comments:

- **Item 1**

What was different about the cake Mma Potokwani had baked this time?

Expected answer:

She had taken particular care to make it the way he liked it/ she had added extra fruits in it/ she had made a fruit cake/ his favourite cake

Many candidates merely stated that she had made a cake for him, without specifying what was actually different about it

- **Item 2**

Why had she taken care to bake this cake differently?

Expected answer:

She had a specific business in mind/ she needed a favour from him.

Some candidates picked up the reason in paragraph 2 (she wanted him to do a sponsored parachute jump)

- **Item 3**

Which word from this paragraph shows that Mr. Matekoni was suspicious when he saw the cake?

Expected answer:

“frowned”

Candidates were penalised for lifting the whole sentence without underlining/ highlighting the word required.

- **Item 5**

At first, Mr. Matekoni did not realise it was a snake. What did he think it was?

Expected answer:

(A thin green) branch of a tree

Candidates were penalised when they only described a movement/ something moving.

- **Item 9**

Give two reasons why Mr. Matekoni was particularly curious about this snake

Expected answer:

- i. It was one of the most poisonous snakes
- ii. There was no serum/ cure/ treatment to deal with its bite.

Where students answered that it was a boomslang and it is one of the most poisonous snakes = one and same answer.

Where students give more than 2 answers, only the first two were marked.

○ **Item 11**

Mr. Matekoni “ did not wish to kill the snake...” (line 30) What does it reveal about its character?

A wide variety of descriptives was accepted for this answer, but still some candidates still failed to come up with acceptable answers for this question. Examples of rejected answers included:

Careless, charming, humble, cautious, brave, enthusiastic.

This shows that certain candidates are unable to empathize with the character.

○ **Item 12**

Explain fully what Mma Potokwani’s “very specific business” had been from the beginning.

Expected answer:

Two specific limbs were required for this answer

Limb 1: to get the help of Mr. Matekoni to raise money/ to take part in a sponsored parachute jump.

Limb 2: to send the boy (who sang well) to Cape Town (for the Maitisong Festival)

1 mark was allotted for each correctly identified limb.

Candidates lost marks if Mr. Matekoni was not mentioned by name, (e.g. if the “*specific business*” was merely “*to raise funds*” without Mr. Matekoni’s role in it not being specified, no credit was given)

The mere lift: “ *I would like... Matekoni*” (line 39) does not cover “*specific business*” in its entirety.

Many candidates lost marks for this question because their answer was not specific enough, (e.g. “*to ask Mr. Matekoni for a favour*”)

○ **Item 13**

Based on your reading of the entire passage, how would you describe Mma Potokwani’s character? Why?

In this question, candidates were asked to assess or describe the character overall. Several plausible answers were given, such as: *cunning, clever, caring, persuasive*, as well as negative ones such as *scheming, controlling or even dishonest*.

Traits of character expressed through a phrase were also acceptable, when correct. Examples are *she likes to manipulate others, she can be very convincing, passionate about her cause, dependent on Mr Matekoni for help, etc...*

Weaker candidates were unable to offer acceptable answers, showing lack of understanding of the situation.

- **Item 14**

The vocabulary question required candidates to explain various words in the context of the passage.

- Where candidates give two different, contradictory answers to one same word, no mark was allocated.
- Spelling mistakes were tolerated so long as meaning was not in doubt. However, changes in word class, e.g. an adverb for an adjective was not accepted
- Changes in verb tenses were tolerated as long as the meaning was clear. For example, *“peered”*: various adverbs with *“looked”* were accepted, such as: with concentration, continuously, searchingly, attentively, even if students changed the original past tense into ‘to look’ (infinitive) and ‘look’ (present tense)
- The manner of looking was the most important aspect
- *Shrieked*: here too, change in the tense were tolerated, but it was the manner and tone which had to be identified. Popular answers were: *“screamed with panic” “yelled”, “cried out”*. However, *“shouted”, “freaked”* were rejected as these words do not convey the strength of the emotion that *“shrieked”* expressed.

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.

Descriptive Writing

The description was quite popular with candidates. Sports day was clearly a familiar topic as most candidates have experienced such a day even at primary school level and most were able to write in some detail.

The better candidates managed to describe the scene on Sports Day properly, creating the right atmosphere consistently. The best responses depicted the full range of senses to give accounts of their surroundings and made effective use of detail to bring the scene they were describing to life. One candidate wrote *“Cheerleaders and mascots had put in hours of preparation in order to demarcate themselves from others on this special day”* and another wrote about how he/she *“was immediately greeted by a cacophony of cheers and the heavy breathing of exhausted athletes.”* Vocabulary was often very impressive and included phrases/sentences like *“The canteen holder had displayed an assortment of colourful foodstuffs, arranging them pleasantly according to their different hues to create a masterful way to virtually entice the exhausted participants,”* *“the triumphant screams of victorious students ...,”* *“Despite the cramped space, I happily joined them in the lively atmosphere where I also brandished along with other spectators, colourful banners which matched the athletes’ sportswear ... “The stocky PE teacher announced the winners and the crowd started disappearing little by little.”*

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

Example 1

Sports Day is an annual event usually held on the summary month of April. On this special occasion, the drowsy atmosphere of the school yard turns into an unrecognisable tumult.

I can see an influx of spectators gravitating towards the playground adorned with motley bannisters and balloons. There, some of the students are seated, awaiting with bated breath for the opening of the event while the participants are warming up vigorously before the start of the competitions. I am quite entranced by the breath-taking performance of a group of daredevil girls. Clad in dazzling attires, they are somersaulting in a deftly manner.

The ambiance that hovers over the school compound is electrifying. The air seems to hum with energy. Squeals of delight and screeches of buoyance intensify the uproar that prevails. All the spectators are supporting vehemently their teams by clapping their hands and singing some familiar tunes.

The sun is casting chords of rays on the surface of the tinsels which are scorching in this torrid atmosphere. To quench my thirst, I flit towards the school canteen and order on embracing beverage with some gooey chocolate cupcakes. The delectable intensity of the dark chocolate re-energises me. I sit down by the side of the podium where the winners are awarded by the principal and teachers from the physical education department.

Despite being disgusted by the miasma of perspiration mixed with the unflattering odour of fat bubbling in the fryers, I can say that the event will remain vivid in my mind.

Although there are some minor grammatical errors, this is a Band One essay. The candidate focuses on what (s)he hears, what (s)he tastes, what (s)he smells and what (s)he sees to describe the scene on sports day. The sentence structures and the correct tense give the essay a natural fluency which is very convincing. Vocabulary is certainly a strong point ('drowsy,' 'tumult,' 'unflattering', 'delectable,' 'miasma') There is a sense that the candidate is very comfortable using such words. The images used are relevant and evocative (influx of spectators; motley banners and balloons; daredevil girls) 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 sensible final paragraph. Spelling, especially quite a mature vocabulary, is notable with only a few slips.

Example 2

On sport day, the school was elegantly decorated. Many students loved the way the school was decorated. There were multicoloured banners hanging in almost every corner of the school. The students were admiring the beauty of the school. The school was enormous, therefore all the students were able to roam everywhere.

However, there was a place which was deserted. It was the garden, we could hear the birds chirping and they seemed to be enjoying their freedom. When all the

activities started, we could hear the students cheering for the friends. The atmosphere was very cheerful and delighted. All the students gathered together. It was like a crowd will all the loud cheering and they were also encouraging their friends.

After an hour of fun activities, the students seemed to be exhausted, therefore they started distributing all the cakes. It was smelling very delicious. The students were delighted to have that amazing cake and with that they continued the game with lots of noise. The time went very fast, as quick as lightning. Finally we had a winner.

Everyone was full of joyed, excited and delighted. However, they were also exhausted. Before we went home, we were offered with lots and loads of cakes and juices which smelled fantastic.

Punctuation is flawed, with sentence separation errors, as in the introduction and in the penultimate paragraph. Some deviation is noted with the mention of the garden. Although clear paragraphing is a merit, the essay would certainly have gained from even more relevant details about sports day. It remains in Band 2 and towards the lower end of the band because of the simplicity, the errors and the content.

Example 3

It all happened on a Friday, the weather was sunny. It was the last day at my school and they organised sports day. All the students were present at eight o'clock. Teachers and students were allowed to wear whatever they want.

The event was supposed to start at nine o'clock. In the mean time, the teachers were setting up the pitch for sprint and other activities. I was soo excited because I was qualified for sprint 200 m and I was very confident to with the race. Then after twenty minutes, the teachers called our every students who were qualified.

At nine o'clock, the 200 m race begin. The first race had six students and I was in too. When the race started, I was the last one. But then I heard my friends and audience shouting my name as I was one of the best sprinter in my school. When I heard them, I gain strength and start running fast and end up finishing first in the race.

I felt very proud of myself and I thanksed everyone who have encourage me winning the race. I won the gold medal and the event continued. I also encouraged all the

students who are participating in the next race. At the end, the event ended and everyone went home early.

There was tendency among weaker responses to indulge in a little too much narrative, with too many details about the personal experience of the writer on sports day. Sports day 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, indicating that instruction to describe a scene had been overlooked right from the outset.

There are, in addition, clear weaknesses in the spelling of very simple vocabulary, even with the simplest words, 'soo,' 'thanksed.' Mistakes are also noted when the pluralised form of words is required. Verb forms and tenses are not secure and the candidate has difficulty maintaining a consistent sequence of tenses – "the 200 m race begin," "Teachers and students were allowed to wear whatever they want," "When I heard them, I gain strength and start running fast and end up finishing". This weakness is made more obvious by poor control of agreement as in "every student who were qualified", "everyone who have." The approach limits the achievement of this essay to Band 4.

Argumentative writing

The argumentative essay this year was: **'Without money, people cannot be happy.'**
Do you agree?

This was quite a popular choice. There were a few extremely thoughtful essays which explored the link between money and happiness. Most responses conveyed a very balanced view of the relationship between money and happiness, though the majority concluded that money was not the only source of happiness. Arguments were quite simple for this essay but most candidates managed to stay relevant. Where responses were at their best was where interesting examples were given. Most of them focused on the luxuries that money could help one afford and associated these to happiness. Most agreed that money allows "people to travel the world, work on their dreams and invest in their hobbies and passions."

However, some candidates had difficulty with this type of writing. It was clear that these candidates had not planned their response before beginning to write and found they did not have enough material to produce a sustained response. Weaker responses tended to list a few ideas rather than explore them. These were repetitive, usually rephrasing a single idea and showing little development. Such responses would have benefited from presenting a few arguments in more depth.

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

Example 1

Money is used as a means of exchange of goods or services. It has been used for many centuries through the form of the barter system to nowadays' notes and coins. People who have more money nowadays have more power. But is money the only way to happiness or can people be happy without money?

In our modern society, money is needed for everything. It can be needed for basic needs and for wants. People with few or without money do not enjoy the facilities money can provide. People get happiness from leisure and entertainment activities like a holiday, watching movies, doing sports in a gym, playing mobile games or spending time on social media. Without money, all these activities cannot be done. In this way, money is need for someone to be happy.

However, money cannot always bring happiness. These are activities and small acts that make someone happy. Spending quality time with family, talking to good friends, greeting people we meet, doing sports at home or in public places, gardening or watching the beauty of nature around us boosts up our emotions, gives us good vibes and makes us happy. A person can be happy without money.

Having money or not, being rich or poor, it does not make difference when it comes to happiness. Joy cannot be bought, it is experienced. It is not necessary to spend money on things that make us happy. Simple activities for free are very good ways to stay happy. It is not true that without money a person cannot be happy and with money a person is happy.

Good candidates generally approached this question logically, offering their personal opinion, supporting this with examples before considering the opposing view and concluding by reinstating their own position. The arguments are presented with clarity. There is no extravagance. Punctuation is correct and paragraphing is good, carefully allowing the argument to build. There are very occasional slips - "money is need" "people with few or without money" but overall, this is a secure piece of writing with a natural feel to it. However, it is not on the highest mark in Band 1 because it lacks some ambition. Also, the punctuation and sentence structure would benefit from a little more variation for effect. It is a good example of how an essay, especially an

argumentative one, can gain a Band 1 without being flamboyant in any respect but by being competent in every aspect.

Example 2

Money is considered as medium of exchange. People use money in everyday life to buy products and services. People gain money from their jobs monthly.

Money is very important. It has been proven during the period of Covid-19. The goods and services have increased as expected. High income groups can purchase the goods & services easily. Money can make us have a luxurious house and comfortable life. Money helps us to afford our needs and wants. Money leads to happiness and enhance our life.

On the other hand, a person without money will certainly find it hard to purchase goods and services on the market. He/She will need to take loans to make little progress. Without money, there will be poor living conditions and people may face depression as he/she won't be able to accomplish his/her wants. He/She will be admired in a decent way by rich people. The poor ones will need to be tiring his/her body for a low income. The life of children of a poor family will not be able to dream or play like a rich one will do.

On my behalf, I agree that 'without money, people cannot be happy.' For the future generations, not to face circumstances, like being poor, he/she needs to have a better education to get a good job.

The paragraphing is logical as it marks out the stages of the argument. The essay does not have much elaboration, but it is certainly a realistic and adequate treatment of the topic. In its language the essay is 'clean', mostly accurate, but it is not particularly ambitious and is therefore at the top of Band 2. Verb forms and tenses are sustained. Although some confusion arises with "The poor ones will need to be tiring" or with the omission of "the cost" of goods, the vocabulary is quite 'safe.' There is relevance to maintain the interest of the reader.

Example 3

People said money can buy happiness. In a way, I agree with them but in others way, I'm not! With money, you can buy a houses but not a family, you can buy a watch, but not time, you may buy someone but not true love, you may buy a hospital but not health. In the way that money can buy happiness is, if you have money, u

may buy food. And for a poor person, if you got money to buy food, you will be a happier person. We all need money to live, to sacrifice our needs and wants but money will never over love. Love is priceless. Nowadays most of people run behind money and drop the most precious thing. When you drop something valuable, you don't realise it earlier, you realise it when you have nothing left. You realise it so hard and badly. I will always choose friendship, love, family, not money. Because I know once I lost the bond, I will never find a bond like that again. Always remember money means nothing if you have a true bond. Well it's my opinion, not everyone thinks the same.

Weaker responses such as above featured a repetition of ideas, confused tenses, an overuse of simple grammatical forms and vocabulary and had numerous spelling mistakes. The language here is flawed and the overall style is colloquial. The accuracy is only occasional; there are practically no 'patches' of clear writing. The errors are sufficiently frequent and serious to hamper precision and to distract the reader from the content. The candidate relies entirely on statement sentences with no attempt to vary the mood. The punctuation suffers from the lack of several full stops. While the vocabulary is simple, it is still subject to error. Paragraphing is non-existent. The overall simplicity of the language combined with the frequency of errors limits the achievement of this essay to Band 4.

Narrative Writing

On the whole, the narrative task was the most preferred and attempted one. This year, candidates were asked to write a story based on the line 'He never thought his friend could betray him like this...' The best candidates produced complex plots, using very accurate G/S/P and precise vocabulary. They used a variety of sentence types to sustain the reader's interest throughout. Weaker candidates, on the other hand, found it hard to develop a plot and used a very erroneous language throughout. Sentence separation issues were particularly noticeable in these scripts. The following candidate responses illustrate examiners' expectations in narrative essays.

Example 1

He never thought his friend could betray him like this. Humans are such strange species, they are ready to betray their acquaintances just to save themselves and their reputation.

I had heard through grapevine that suspicious happenings took place in the derelict house in the outskirts of London. Malevolent people had taken over the dilapidated building and were using it as their hideout. I decided to crack the mystery. Accompanied by a police dog, Roxy, we stealthily crept up the gill which led to the ramshackled house. Slashing thick, intertwined creepers, I succeeded in opening an access for us. Upon leaping into the house, I stood agape at the immense hall. "Bats and spiders seem to be

A clear example of a complex and sophisticated piece of writing. This is undoubtedly a Band 1 essay. The candidate has an intricate plot and the language is essentially very accurate throughout. The vocabulary used is impressive (derelict, malevolent, stealthily, ramshackle, intertwined, stood agape...etc.). The candidate has made use of a variety of sentence structures and the coherence in the ideas is noteworthy

Example 2

It all occurred on the night of Halloween. Two friends Zade and Carden decided to go on an adventure. They went to explore an abandoned house found in their neighbourhood. They thought it was a fun idea for such a spooky night.

The house was said to be abandoned for many years and no one dared go inside as those who did never came back. Many stories were narrated by elders in the town on that house. Once reaching there they saw that the house was enormous and it had roots of trees growing on its walls. As the front door was locked they scurried around to find an entry.

“ I found one” hollared Carden. Zade rushed towards him. Once inside the house they couldn’t see much even with their flashlight as it was pitch dark. Suddenly they heard a loud banged coming from upstairs. They decided to go check it out. While climbing the stairs Carden stopped on his tracks. “ I don’t think we are alone here” said Carden in a worried voice.

Zade glanced around him and said sarcasm oozing from his words. “ Yeah right....keep walking”. They chose a random room and peered inside. But they both went as pale as a ghost. Inside the room was a boy chained unconsciously to a chair. He was covered in blood . Paralysed with fear Carden could not move but Zade rushed to help the boy.

Zade was shouting for Carden to come help him but he couldn’t move. At the same time they heard the clanking of metal which meant that whoever had chained the boy was coming back and they had to hurry up and get out of the house. Just when Zade had successfully unchained the boy, Carden had closed the door and ran from there. He never thought his friend could betray him like this.

This response lacks sophistication. While there is an attempt at complexity, the plot sounds more like a series of events. The language has some accurate vocabulary (Spooky, scurried, oozing, peering) but punctuation and spelling mistakes are frequent. Hence, this response scores well, but cannot be awarded the best marks (Band 2).

Example 3

Louis had a secret that no one could believed. He never told someone about it he only told his best friend James.

James was his best friend since Pre-Primary school they were like brothers. One day a new student came at their school, his name was Josh. When Josh arrived in school he saw Louis and started to trash talking on Louis, he ignored Josh and continue walking. James was very impressed by Josh he decided to be friend with him.

Josh wanted to know all the weakness of Louis so he accepted to friend with James in the aim of recolting the weakness of Louis. Josh asked James: “ What is the biggest secret of your best friend Louis?”

James: “ He had.....I cannot tell you that...I am sorry”

Josh: “Okay then. I am not your friend then”

James: “Okay he had kill the Principle’s cat.”

Josh: “Oh now I know his secret”

Louis heard everything. He never thought that his friend could betray him like this with his big brother.

While there is a relevant storyline in this response, language mistakes are numerous. Errors are frequent – from punctuation, sentence separation to spelling mistakes. For this reason, this response is towards the lower end of the mark spectrum (Band 5)

Question 10: Literary Appreciation

The literature component was comprised of 2 Options, **Poetry and Prose**: an adaptation of the poem ***Stop all the Clocks***, by W H Auden and an extract from ***Things Fall Apart***, by Chinua Achebe.

Option A – Poetry (10 marks)

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, responding empathetically, analyzing character, plot, themes and expressing sensitivity to language and the use of stylistic devices. This year, the task was set on W.H Auden's *Funeral Blues*.

Generally, candidates did well on the tasks asking them to identify literary devices and their effects. Questions requiring an understanding of parts of the poem were also well answered. Nonetheless, 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 pattern in “song-wrong”

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”: “He was my North, my South, my East and West” or “I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong”

Item 3 (a) and (b): This item required candidates to recognize an example of personification and also its effect. While a good number of candidates managed to recognize that “*Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead*” was the correct answer, fewer candidates managed to explain that personification would help in comparing airplanes to human beings (who are moaning) or to give human attributes to a non-living thing.

Item 4 (i) and (ii)

This item assessed understanding of figurative language through the following lines:

(i) “He was my North, my South, my East and West”

Many candidates easily managed to display a clear understanding of the lines and address the key idea that he was her world, her everything and/ or gave her a sense of direction, but it was noted that some literally paraphrased the lines as he was giving her good directions.

(ii) “The stars are not wanted now, put out every one”

Candidates struggled in this part of the Question and had difficulty in demonstrating understanding of the line. The central idea that the Poet doesn’t want anything anymore and /or her life is full of darkness/ has no happiness was not identified. Credit was given to candidates who managed to identify the feelings of the poet, such as she was depressed, pessimistic and had lost hope.

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, evidence of analysis, were insightful and well supported with close reference to the poem earned the 3 marks on offer.

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

- Death / loss of a loved one
- Loneliness/ hopelessness/ despair
- Heartbreak / breakup

Find below a few samples to illustrate the range of answers obtained this year. The samples are here solely to provide educators with an idea of standards and of examiners’ expectations.

Example 1

I think that the poem is about a girl who has lost her beloved boyfriend, who meant the world to her: “He was my North, my South, my East and West”. Now that her boyfriend is dead, life seems meaningless to her. She feels hopeless and lonely “For nothing can come to any good.” As she is in despair, she wants silence “Silence the pianos and with muffled drums.”

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

Example 2

It is about love for someone as the poet says ““He was my North, my South, my East and West”. He was so much in love that he cannot get the person out of his head. He further says to “pack the moon and dismantle the sun” as he is very depressed and feels that he lost the love of his life.

This sample shows some evidence of understanding of the poem and recognises the key idea of death and loss of a loved one. However, there is not enough analysis for this to warrant the best marks.

Example 3

The poem is talking about unsuccessful love: "I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong"

Although not irrelevant, this response is very limited. There is no real attempt to offer an interpretation. There is a clear lack of analysis. It was common to find such responses in the scripts of weaker candidates.

Example 4

The poem is about love. It is talking about someone's feelings.

This response shows very little understanding of the poem. It looks like vague statements about the poem with no attempt made at offering an interpretation and defending it.

Option B – Prose (10 marks)

The prose extract was from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Candidates were assessed on their ability to identify specific literary devices in MCQs and their effects in explicit questions. They were tested on their understanding of some parts of the extract, and their opinion on the main character and the main message.

Generally, candidates did well at the tasks asking them to identify literary devices and not as well at explaining the effects. Questions requiring explanation of parts of the extract were also well answered. Also, the last question, asking for a personal interpretation and analysis of the character and the message, supported by close reference, was well attempted by only a small number of candidates.

Item 1 (a) and (b)

Candidates were asked to recognize a simile and also its effect.

Generally, well answered. Candidates had little difficulty identifying the simile: *He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season.*

In (b) the effect of the simile caused quite some difficulty to candidates who could not establish a comparison between Ikemefuna and a yam tendril. The idea of “Comparison” was missing in many answers.

Item 2 (a) and (b)

This item assessed knowledge of narrative voice and an example. Most candidates correctly identified that the narrator uses the third person narrative in the extract.

Most candidates managed to find a piece of evidence in any of the following quotes including “he”, “Okonkwo”. “Ikemefuna” or “Nwoye”.

Item 3 (a), (b), (c)

This item assessed understanding of the following lines:

3 (a) “He had become wholly absorbed into his new family.”

Generally well answered, candidates did not have any difficulty explaining that he was completely at ease, felt at home and was an integral part of the family. Those who interpreted the above lines as he became like the true son or real child of Okonkwo were also awarded marks.

3(b) “...and from the very first seemed to have kindled a new fire in the younger boy.”

The key idea here was that Ikemefuna inspired/ encouraged Nwoye to become a man and / or develop his personality. While a good number of candidates scored the 1 mark on offer on this item, some had trouble in understanding the lines and interpreted the above as Ikemefuna was jealous of Nwoye.

3 (c) “He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father’s household when he was dead ...”

Candidates fared well on this item and explained how Ikemefuna wanted Nwoye to take over the household when he was gone and become the next leader in the family.

Item 4

This item required candidates to elaborate on their understanding of the extract, provide an informed opinion and also give a well-supported answer on Okonkwo's idea of what being a man is.

Two approaches to answering this question were accepted:

1. Candidates could give **their own opinion** of Okonkwo's idea of masculinity.
2. Candidates could **describe** Okonkwo's version of masculinity.

Both approaches were credited. Find below few samples from both "Opinion" and "Description" that illustrate the range of answers obtained.

Own Opinion on Okonkwo's idea of Masculinity

Example 1

Based on my reading of the extract, Okonkwo has a very shallow understanding of what gender roles are and he is very strict when it comes to being a man. His view on "manliness" is outdated, "grow into a tough young man... ruling his father's household..." why did it have to be Nwoye? It could very well be a woman in the household who is as capable and responsible as Okonkwo's heir. Unfortunately, women are never offered such opportunities. It is also stated that, "how prosperous a man was if he was unable to rule his women and his children and especially his women, he was not really a man" Okonkwo's views are purely sexist. Maybe the children needed discipline but why should women be ruled and ordered around?According to Okonkwo a prosperous man should also have "enough in his barn to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices" This implies that a man should regularly provide food to his ancestors as offerings to gain their blessings.....

The above extract gives an accurate opinion on what he /she understands on Okonkwo's idea of masculinity. The work provides a clear analysis, an informed opinion and uses relevant textual references. This piece of work scores highly.

Example 2

According to me, his idea of being a man encourages toxic masculinity as his ideas are out of touch with reality. He wants Nwoye to take over his household and this proves that for ages only men have run the household. We now live in a modern society where women are more capable than men. This extract kills the idea of gender equality.

This response shows some evidence of understanding. Limited analysis and reference to the extract make this answer weak.

Example 3

Being a man means that you are responsible and take care of your family. You care for your children and do not abuse your wife.

This response scored 1 mark as the candidate offered a general opinion on Masculinity without any analysis nor any support from the extract.

Example 4

Being a man means living happily with his family and planting yam.

This is a clear example of a candidate who did not understand the extract and offers no personal opinion. This answer is irrelevant and hence insufficient to meet the 1-mark criteria.

Description of Okonkwo's Idea of Masculinity

Example 1

Okonkwo thinks that a man should be made up of all masculine qualities, he should be strong: "Grow into a tough man". He further thinks that a man should be rich and "prosperous". He should have enough food to feed his family and his "ancestors with regular sacrifices". Finally, the ideal image of a man according to Okonkwo is one who is superior to a woman. He should be strong and dominant so as to "control his women-folk later in life" otherwise the man is "not really a man".

This answer scored full 3 marks as the candidate showed a clear understanding of the extract while providing an insightful response. The candidate strengthened the answer with relevant references.

Example 2

Being a good man is not easy at all. He should be a prosperous man, have enough to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices and be able to control the women-folk later in life. Being a man, he should be able to rule his wife and children. He should do it equally among the wives ensuring that they are a happy family.

This response is a clear sample of understanding of the extract with no analysis. The response closely refers to the extract but lacks the depth of analysis.

Example 3

Okonkwo was a man who could control his women and children, especially his women.

This response gives a literal meaning of the extract. It is very limited as response and has no evidence of analysis nor reference. The candidate scores 1 mark.

Example 4

It is being a villager who has many wives, children and ancestors.

This response shows no understanding of the extract. Very vague and irrelevant answer. Candidate scores zero.