

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION

ADVANCED LEVEL

ENGLISH

MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**AM ENGLISH
MAY 2014 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

Introduction

English language proficiency, critical acumen and literary engagement are the three pillars of this examination. Therefore, candidates are expected to write accurately and fluently in the target language, English; which is, for the majority of the candidates the language they have lived with and been exposed to in various forms and quantities for the past thirteen years. They are also expected to demonstrate a level of maturity in their writing through their skill to engage critically with texts, whether seen or unseen. Finally, the depth by which they explore a range of literary forms should reflect the solid work done throughout their final two years of post-secondary education.

Similar to last year, examiners observed that most of the candidates were conversant in the content and able to recall most of the facts with near accuracy. However, they were not always able to match the depth of understanding, one presumes they would have achieved by now, with the quality of responses expected at this level. On a positive note, a small measure of improved performance was detected in this year's cohort; all examiners in all three papers noted this phenomenon. The extreme poor performance noted in the last two years was not present this year. This is not to say that poor idiomatic and grammatical expression as well as serious tense misuse were not rampant in some of the scripts. Therefore, the improvement in quality is noted with caution.

The report highlights the most pending issues both in candidates' linguistic production as well as in their response to a range of text types, literary and non-literary. We refer to these issues as pending because they recur from year to year and we use pointers in this report to send candidates to previous sections of past reports. We consider each report as a work-in-progress that carries forward strengths and weaknesses in candidates' speaking and writing skills from one year to the next. Among others, these are the main concerns: register, relevance and focus, punctuation, and use of quotations.

Register

In quite a number of essays, a new persisting trend has emerged, that is, the profuse employment of colloquial terms. This may be a result of their immersion in informal language registers pertaining to mobile telephony and social networking contexts. These are contexts that provide learners with the opportunity to communicate in English, but then are also rather informal and telegraphic in their linguistic production. Candidates are expected to understand that the choice of register varies according to the choice of essay, be it literary or non-literary. They should be aware of the appropriate use of language registers.

Relevance and Focus

The excellent answers are indicative of mature thinking, impressive writing skills and an ability to engage in critical analysis. These serve as evidence of potential that may be targeted and achieved through focus and commitment. Unfortunately, such qualities are hindered by a keenness to impress by quantity. Some candidates are still labouring under the false impression that sheer quantity equals higher marks. Candidates must learn to zero in on the key words in the question, and to keep focused on what they imply throughout the essay. Examiners wish to reiterate that the necessity of relevance to the question, as was stated in the last report, cannot be highlighted enough. It is disheartening to see the work of candidates who have clearly prepared themselves thoroughly being constantly

undermined because of their inability to focus on the precise demands of the question set.

Punctuation

Punctuation errors remain an ever-present problem. Punctuation is fundamental to the most basic forms of syntax, and yet, the omission of commas, misuse of semi-colons and absence of capitalisation are present in the majority of scripts. Correct use of punctuation is dependent on developing an understanding of clause embedding and a keen sense of rhythm.

Use of quotations

Another observation highlighted by examiners was the use (misuse) of quotations. These should be used wisely to substantiate an argument to illustrate a point; they should not be inserted randomly. The latter does not impress the examiners. Sensible quote embedding and good selection of quotes are in question here and this requires addressing. Similar comments were reiterated in past reports, and it is imperative that candidates take heed of such sound advice.

To end on a more general note, spelling is still a notable weakness; however, there appears to have been a general improvement. It is important to stress that some of the common spelling errors seem to have fossilized, such as *where* instead of *were*, *comitted* instead of *committed*, and yet the same candidates who make such orthographic errors are often able to spell *septicaemia* correctly. Perhaps, one should alert learners to the commonness of these errors and highlight how paying extra attention to these would minimise such oversight. On a macro level, coherence and cohesion still remain a major concern, as is the indiscriminate use of the historic present and past tenses.

Statistical Data The Table below summarises the distribution of Grades for Advanced Level English 2014.

Distribution of Grades – May 2014 Results		
Grade	No. of Candidates	% of Candidates
A	25	3.8
B	73	11.2
C	215	33.1
D	126	19.4
E	91	14
F	74	11.4
Absent	46	7.1
Total	650	100

Grade	No. of Candidates	% of Candidates
A – C	313	48.1
A – E	530	81.5
F	74	11.4

**PAPER I
Section A
Shakespeare:
General
Comments**

The vast majority of candidates answered questions on *Othello*, four candidates answered one of the questions on *Julius Caesar* and three candidates attempted questions on *The Tempest*. Four candidates did not answer any question from Section A.

The overall impression is that this year's candidates demonstrated a stronger

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	<p>command of the English Language than the candidates who sat for last year's examination. In spite of this, however, there were many cases of poor grammatical structures and clumsiness of expression, often with direct translation from Maltese (e.g. <i>Othello made suicide, how a good man Cassio is</i>). Punctuation errors with commas being used when full stops were called for, the indiscriminate use of the small and capital letters as well as incorrect spelling (the most recurring being: <i>elopment, ellopment, lieutanant, leftenent, leiutenent, Venecians, Venitian, charachter, marraige, scence, apperences, villian, decieve, betrayel, Shakespear, loose as in loose his position, more then, thought</i> instead of <i>throughout, devastated, devastated</i>) were rife.</p> <p>The syllabus, <i>Appendix 1: Notes to Students and Teachers</i>, states that the title of a play should be underlined. The vast majority of candidates overlooked this and placed the title within inverted commas or else underlined it and used inverted commas.</p> <p>As was the case in previous examinations, a weakness in this year's essays was the lack of close reference to the text. Candidates preparing for this exam should be aware of the fact that arguments need to be substantiated by evidence from the text. Direct quotation is also necessary. There were many cases where this was lacking.</p>
Specific Comments	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
1a	The candidates who attempted this question did not fare too well. Some ignored the given extract and wrote an essay about Caesar's character, others simply discussed the theme, whilst others did not contextualize the extract and wrote a very sketchy essay.
1b	The candidates who attempted this question simply provided a historical account of Julius Caesar and his conquests.
1c	This question was not attempted.
	<i>The Tempest</i>
2a	This question was not attempted.
2b	Valid information was provided yet detail was lacking. The essays were, therefore, rather superficial. A more in-depth analysis of the text was necessary. Candidates must refrain from writing at length on the background to the text.
2c	The essays were quite good overall.
	<i>Othello</i>
3a	38% of the candidates attempted this question, and although answers on the gobbet question were overall better than last year's, the reasons why some did not score highly or satisfactorily are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. they concentrated far too much on the events before and after the extract, hence narrating the plot of the play rather than focusing on the extract itself; ii. they focused mainly on Iago's character yet failed to illustrate those characteristics they discussed from the extract itself, opting instead to illustrate from the rest of the play;

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. they wrote an essay on reputation completely ignoring the given extract; iv. they narrated the events in the extract rather than discussed them; v. they focused on one element when the rubric specifically stated that they should focus on at least two items; vi. planning was very poor. Candidates did not seem to have a clear focus in their answer.
3b	The answers of the majority of the 34% of candidates who attempted this question were below the standard required. The main reason for performing below the desired level in this question was the fact that they did not refer closely enough to or completely ignored the statement in the question, which called for some form of discussion on their part. As a result, they assumed the question simply expected them to describe Othello's downfall with the consequence that they wrote at length about the causes of Othello's downfall without referring to the <i>husband</i> or <i>general</i> parts mentioned in the question. Notwithstanding the above, there were a few outstanding essays where the statement in the question was discussed at great length and in depth.
3c	<p>Many of the 27% of candidates who chose this question did not fare too well for one or more of the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. they only discussed one outsider, Othello; ii. they only stated facts without providing any analysis, for instance, of the effect of being an outsider on the characters themselves and/or on the plot; iii. they attempted to describe in what way certain characters were outsiders without being too convincing in doing so.
	This year's examination session confirms what last year's examination proved, mainly that candidates do not do too well in questions where they are asked to discuss a statement. They fail to read the statement carefully enough and appear to focus on a word that sounds familiar to them, for instance in the case of (3b), <i>downfall</i> , and write an essay on it. Candidates need to prepare themselves better for the type of questions asked in this year's session.
Section B Poetry: General Comments	<p>Candidates, overwhelmingly, opted to answer questions on Wilfred Owen, with only a few choosing Emily Dickinson and John Keats. Candidates who chose to answer questions on the poetry of Wilfred Owen ranged from the excellent (around 2%) to the very poor.</p> <p>It is also noted that the choice of poems made by candidates to illustrate their answers was limited in range and scope. Largely, the more popular poems such as <i>Dulce et decorum est</i>, <i>Disabled</i> and <i>The Dead-Beat</i> were chosen and the way candidates wrote about these poems did not always fit the question chosen, whether it was (a) or (b).</p> <p>Overall, it is noted that with the exception of just a handful, candidates lack critical knowledge. On the other hand, most were very well prepared with regard to knowledge of text and a few even displayed a wider and more comprehensive awareness of the age.</p>
Specific Comments	Emily Dickinson
1a & 1b	Candidates who answered the Emily Dickinson questions did not affirm a strong grasp either of the content of Dickinson's work or of the questions chosen.

	Consequently, the essays lacked conceptual rigour and were written in largely poor English. Structurally, there was no cohesion or tautness. Instead, a very superficial narrative account of a couple of poems was given.
	John Keats
2a	The very small number of candidates who wrote essays on John Keats likewise manifested a weak affinity with the chosen poems. Almost all chose question (a) and, again, essays were largely of a descriptive and/or narrative style.
2b	Few chose the narrative poems, engaging with an elaborate summary of the poem and those who chose the Odes showed better understanding of themes, tone, and symbolism. However, these were largely disappointing answers.
	Wilfred Owen
3a	The majority chose this question and while there were a few very good essays, a large number of candidates either failed to answer the question or did not address it directly. Most wrote on 'memory and madness', engaging in elaborate descriptions of episodes found in selected poems, without focusing on ' <i>the horrors of memory and madness</i> ', which is not the same thing. Those candidates who did very well in this question wrote in an articulate way, both linguistically and conceptually. They structured their essays impressively and addressed the question in a direct and lucid manner. There was a firm grasp of the content of the poems and some also wrote meta-commentaries. Quotations in these answers were spot-on and were used to enhance an argument, rather than a random choice of text that did not relate to what was being written about.
3b	Candidates who wrote good essays for this question fared less well than those who did well in Question (a). Essays here were largely of a descriptive nature and very rarely did a candidate write a critically grounded answer.
Section C: Poetry Criticism	<p>The poem chosen for this year's Literary Criticism task was <i>Geography Lesson</i> by Brian Patten. In this section of the report, the candidates' general performance will be assessed with special emphasis given to the following aspects of the submitted essays:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Interpretation ii. Use of English iii. Text Organisation and the implications of the rubric iv. Critical skills and other aspects of writing <p><i>Interpretation</i></p> <p>In line with the candidates' performance in the May 2013 sitting, due to the relative simplicity of the poem presented in the May 2014 session, misinterpretation and over-interpretation were not a significant issue in the candidates' performance in this sitting. Although a small number of candidates failed to produce a valid interpretation of the poem, the themes and subject matter of <i>Geography Lesson</i> were generally discussed with a degree of competence in the majority of essays.</p> <p><i>Use of English</i></p> <p>As in previous reports, the examiners feel the need to insist on the fact that accuracy and fluency in use of English is a fundamental criterion in the grading of the candidates' essays. In order for candidates to be given at least an average mark in any section of the exam, they need to 'write lucidly, fluently and</p>

accurately' (2014 Syllabus, Assessment Objective). A detailed analysis of the most common language errors in the essays was provided in the 2012 and 2013 reports.

This year, the examiners would like to highlight what seems to be a recurring trend in candidates' writing, that is, problems of cohesion and coherence of thought that are manifested both in sentence structure mistakes and, more widely, in loose paragraphs or inappropriate transitions. At sentence level, a very high frequency of mistakes related to sentence structure (fragments, comma splice, run-on sentences and dangling modifiers) has been noted, and this kind of problem is more prevalent than what may be considered to be other common grammar mistakes, such as those involving tenses, articles, agreement, etc. In other words, the issue being outlined here is more conceptual than strictly proficiency-related.

Text Organisation and the implications of the rubric

Readers of this report are encouraged to refer to the detailed overviews of essay types attempted by candidates in the literary criticism component that were published in the 2012 and 2013 Examiners' Reports. No attempt will be made here to replicate the thoroughness of those sections because what is included there is still valid for this year's cohort. However, a few further comments are provided below.

The examiners reiterate that no particular essay structure is always preferable in this section of the examination. Indeed, successful essays about *Geography Lesson* adopted a wide variety of approaches, including line-by-line readings of the poem and more structured approaches based on a discussion of separate aspects of the poem. The poem presented this year was particularly amenable to what may be described as a 'chronological' response due to the shift in the middle of the poem. However, in this kind of essay there is always the risk of replacing commentary and appreciation with an excessive emphasis on simply paraphrasing the poem. A peculiar aberration, in this respect, was the way a number of essays approached the poem word by word to the extent that the poem was barely discussed as a whole and words were often taken out of context. While close reading is a skill that is expected and rewarded at this level, an inability to relate the words or phrases discussed to the stanza or poem as a whole is considered a weakness, as it is conducive to atomistic analyses of language.

Finally, two other issues, which were discussed at length in the 2013 report, but which deserve to be reiterated here. Firstly, formulaic approaches are strongly discouraged. Formulaic essays provide 'a checklist' or a series of annotations addressing a list of formal aspects of the poem. Such essays typically include lists of metaphors, lists of words considered to be significant, lists of images, an analysis of versification, and more, without these aspects being in some way integrated into a general appreciation of the poem.

Secondly, trying to address each and every poetic device listed as possible (*not compulsory*) areas of focus in the rubric is more often than not a strategic mistake. The reason for this is that such essays tend to be somewhat superficial or involve candidates trying too hard to apply terminology that they are not really in command of. In particular, a majority of candidates were found to use the terms, 'rhetoric' and 'motifs', wrongly, while very few candidates discussed 'place, time and mood' in a convincing way.

Critical skills and other aspects of writing

As also highlighted in the 2012 and 2013 Examiners' Reports, one area in which candidates need to show a general improvement is the use of close reference and

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	<p>quotations from the text. (See the 2013 report for a detailed discussion of the use of quotations). This goes hand in hand with the ability to close read, a skill that is becoming rare in candidates' essays but that is still highly valued in this examination and at this level. Indeed, what drew the examiners' attention more than anything in the May 2014 sitting is that while the vast majority of candidates had accurate things to say about the poem provided, many of these essays lacked the skills required to do so in any depth, often dealing with the poem at what may be described a 'superficial' level of analysis, rather than one traditionally associated with the humanities and, more specifically, literary criticism and appreciation. This does not mean that candidates should be instructed to appreciate poetry in terms of quest for hidden meanings, but they should be aware that literary criticism is strongly associated with a sensitivity for language and poetic thought that goes beyond the simple listing of facts about poetry.</p>
<p>PAPER II Section A Novel: General Comments</p>	<p><i>General comment on the gobbet</i> Unlike last year's feedback on the gobbet, this year's candidates did not fare well in this question. In fact, there were weaker gobbet answers in three of the favoured novels (<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>, <i>Atonement</i>, and <i>Great Expectations</i>). Frequently, there were the typical extremes in the type of answers: (i) the gobbet was used to include aspects of the novel which were not remotely relevant to the extract; or (ii) one of the salient points in the extract was highlighted and the answer became an essay on that particular theme/character. Noticeably, there were less instances of paraphrasing of the extract.</p> <p>The problem of coherence and cohesion was highlighted in the introductory comments of this report; however, it is necessary to reiterate that the advice given in previous reports was not embraced by this year's candidates. Each and every point selected to defend an argument in an essay should follow logically one from the other. Ideas should be presented in a structured manner.</p>
<p>Specific Comments:</p>	
<p><i>The</i> <i>Handmaid's</i> <i>Tale</i></p>	<p>As has been evident in the past seven years, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> is still one of the most popular set texts with 82% of candidates opting for it. Problems in answering the gobbet are still present and it seems that candidates have not yet grasped the approach necessary to write a good gobbet answer.</p>
<p>1a</p>	<p>In general most candidates need to work harder on the 'gobbet' task. While most of the candidates identified the immediate context, the main deficiency was a perfunctory and superficial treatment of the extract, with many candidates barely bothering to pay reasonably close attention to it. For instance many failed to analyse Offred's state of mind and the tone (irony) of the narrative. Having said that, there were some outstandingly good responses to the passage, marked by a balanced attention to both the extract and its significance within the overall economy of the novel. Again, candidates need to be warned not to sprawl in commenting on the implications of the passage for the rest of the novel, straying into irrelevant descriptive details. Moreover, they should be trained to focus on the really relevant feature present in it out of the four suggested in the rubric. For instance, if setting plays a negligible role in the excerpt, they should refrain from forcing long descriptions of it that are mostly unrelated to the passage. A minor but still disconcerting habit was the failure to use capital letters when referring to the title of novels or their authors.</p>
<p>1b</p>	<p>Overall most candidates who chose the essay task performed better than the ones who chose the gobbet. Once more, however, there was a conspicuous lack of concentration on the wording of the question, especially when referring to the</p>

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	<p>'most intimate aspects...'. Quite a good number of candidates failed to concentrate on questions of personal identity, sexual intimacy and psychological/spiritual oppression implied by those key words. As a result, many essays tried to go 'all over' the novel, with rambling descriptions and narrations of merely social and political tyranny that wasted time and space without spelling the 'intimate aspects' they involve. Another problematic area was quotation: when it was not utterly random and outright irrelevant, it was boringly uniform and limited in range. Again, candidates should be reminded that they are not expected to be exhaustive and exhausting in treating a particular theme, thinking that sheer length (6-7 pages of closely written script) will compensate for lack of focused and relevant exposition of the subject posed by the question. Another annoying practice was the constant and confused switching between historic present and past tenses in commenting on incidents in the novel.</p>
Jane Austen	<p>This novel was chosen by 7% of candidates who set for the examination; evidently, it is one of the least popular novels. Generally, candidates performed at a slightly higher level than last year. Question 2(a) was the preferred choice.</p>
2a	<p>Ever since the recent introduction of this novel in the AM syllabus, the answers to the gobbet may be considered as the best ones so far. Most of the candidates were on task, those who developed a good response to the extract succeeded in contextualising it and in striking a balance between relating it to relevant themes/characters and keeping the passage within focus. Only very few deviated completely from the extract and dedicated almost the entire essay to the theme of matchmaking in <i>Emma</i>.</p>
2b	<p>It seems that this question proved to be somewhat difficult; first, it was the least popular of the two, and second, Mr Knightley's criticism of Emma: "Better be without sense than misapply it as you do" was interpreted to mean Emma losing control of her imagination. It seems quite strange but there were instances of echoes of Briony's imagination from the novel <i>Atonement</i>. This phenomenon of interference may have resulted from the fact that the second novel studied by these candidates was <i>Atonement</i>. Of the already small number of essays, very few produced an essay which was relevant to the title. In such cases, the essay resulted in a lengthy account of a series of episodes highlighting instances when Emma makes poor judgement.</p>
Great Expectations	<p>About 14% of the candidates chose to write on <i>Great Expectations</i>, and the choice of questions was evenly distributed. Performance in the two questions was somewhat uneven because the gobbet answers were generally weaker than the responses to the essay title. However, the weakness was not as much a result of the approach to the gobbet but the inability to locate the excerpt in the text.</p>
3a	<p>When compared to Question 3b, there was a generally poor performance in the gobbet answer. A significant number of candidates who opted for this question assumed that the event described in the gobbet was the instance when Pip and Miss Havisham have an open and frank discussion about the past. This confusion may have been a result of the close proximity of the two events; in fact, Pip had just had the conversation about Estella with Miss Havisham before they parted; whereas, the excerpt hones in on Pip and his vision of Miss Havisham hanging to the beam, this motivated him to return to her and ensure her safety. The failure to identify the context more accurately, as highlighted here, did not translate into a significant lowering of the marks allotted to this question. Many of the candidates were, after all, close to the context. However, a factor that contributed to a poor performance was the candidates' tendency to focus their answer on the first paragraph, which ties in with the preceding episode (pre-extract), ignoring the rest</p>

	<p>of the gobbet. Their answers turned into a lengthy discussion of Miss Havisham's realisation of the wrong inflicted on Estella and Pip and her cry for forgiveness. Unfortunately, some of these answers omitted any reference to the visual images of the decrepit and dilapidated physical setting as perceived by Pip in the gobbet. A more disappointing set of answers – these were very few but worth including in this report – revealed that there are candidates who still ignore the gobbet when choosing to answer this type of question. Typically, they referenced it in the introduction and conclusion with the rest of the essay becoming completely unrelated to the gobbet.</p>
3b	<p>Contrary to expectations, candidates were not always able to explore 'the hollowness of expectations' in the novel; instead, most of them resorted to a list of Pip's expectations. Last year's observation that applies to this year's cohort too: candidates were unable to sift through their material and could not marshal their argument into a coherent whole. The general approach was a series of self-contained paragraphs, each ably discussed, whose only connection was that they were all dealing with the relationships within the novel. (2013 Examiners' Report)</p> <p>Three categories of essays were identified; these were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Essays with a predominant focus on the narration of a series of episodes representing Pip's failure. ii. Essays composed of a list of examples of failures, but which also included some limited reference to the hollowness of expectations. Often, the latter occurred as an afterthought following the narration of an episode. iii. Essays that gave an excellent presentation of the various characters, and Pip in particular, while illustrating the main argument. These were thorough, insightful and the discussions hinged onto Dickens and his objective to instruct and expose Victorian society. <p>Type (iii) demonstrated the candidates' ability to evaluate and discuss the overarching significance of hollowness in expectations.</p>
<i>The Heart of the Matter</i>	<p>The popularity of this novel still applies, and similar to last year, it was the third most widely chosen novel with 40% of candidates choosing it. The choice of questions was balanced; both questions were equally popular.</p>
4a	<p>The general impression is that candidates did better in answering the Greene gobbet than the Atwood one. Once more, however, there was an impatient tendency to skim through the extract and move on to the rest of the novel without teasing out its full and important implications. For instance, many failed to notice, much less comment, on the fine irony implied in the statement 'but he was unaccustomed to lies', and its implications on the manner and motives of Scobie's habitual lying (even to himself) in the rest of the story. Though by no means an exercise in practical criticism, this task demands closer attention to the use of significant language in it that carries deeper implications about character and theme throughout the novel. For instance, some responded quite sensitively to the implications of such phrases as 'sweat seeped between his fingers...' or even more 'One felt this way before a proposal of marriage or a first crime.' This constant shuttling between the particular and the more general should be stressed in candidates' preparation for this task.</p>
4b	<p>Quite a number of candidates did fairly well in this question. Many answers were</p>

	<p>pertinent and comprehensive. Still, though some candidates recognised this, a considerable number missed the central ironical paradox that in being loyal to certain personal hang-ups, Scobie betrayed more important and valid principles. One common tendency was, in fact, to concentrate exclusively on Scobie while ignoring the other characters' involvement in questions of loyalty and betrayal. Another was to merely give a list of examples and incidents with minimum critical comment or discussion about them. This rendered many essays severely restricted in scope and disconnected in presentation. Some essays were too diffused and vague, others were rambling and too full of circumstantial and unimportant or irrelevant details. Inaccurate quotations and even outright ignorance of plot were further drawbacks in some essays. Many candidates need to focus more on the selection of relevant material, continuity and coherence of presentation, as well as overall improvement in idiomatic expression.</p>
<p>Atonement</p>	<p>With a slight increase over last year, <i>Atonement</i> attracted responses from 59% of candidates, with the gobbet proving to be less popular than the essay (only 14% of those who chose this novel attempted the gobbet). It is crucial that candidates are accurate in their knowledge of the facts; this will avoid the confusion between factual evidence and interpretation. The problem that seems to recur in the responses to this novel is the categorical assertions that candidates make in their essays. Some of these may be a product of long discussions in class which may have led to a particular position taken about some aspects of the novel. However, candidates do not always possess the acumen to distinguish between a conclusion reached after a long debate and a fact. For example:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Briony only imagines Robbie to be the rapist due to her reading the letter he accidentally sent to her sister and the library scene in which he was making love to Cecilia.</i></p> <p>Hedging is a skill candidates should acquire when they venture into interpretation.</p>
<p>5a</p>	<p>Those few candidates who chose this question located the context with minimal errors. However, their response was not well grounded in the extract and their discussions evolved into two separate directions, either a lengthy narration of the epilogue or a detailed reference to Briony's accusation back in 1935. Having said this, it must be noted that there were a few excellent responses; these revealed sound knowledge of the text and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the narrative technique and the appropriate choice of terms which dominate the novel's ending. The links between the extract and the various themes/characters were also evident and well developed.</p>
<p>5b</p>	<p>These essays were quite varied and encompassed the full range of levels. The problem of categorical assertions, as noted earlier, was more evident in these essays. The majority included examples of imagination and truth, but lacked critical engagement and depth. The paragraphs were disconnected and it seemed that a list of points was being attempted but never quite developed; in fact, there was an endless repetition of the main sequence of events: first, the <i>fountain scene</i>, then the <i>library scene</i>, followed by <i>Lola's rape</i>. Candidates resorted to this sequence to describe Briony's imagination, but the focus was almost always limited to this, and 'truth' and 'memory' were often ignored.</p> <p>Some of the candidates' categorical assertions are included in the following list:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>Briony is jealous of her sister Cecilia.</i> ii. <i>The reader should not believe what Briony wrote.</i> iii. <i>The fountain, letter and library scenes are responsible for Briony's accusation.</i> iv. <i>Briony achieves atonement.</i> v. <i>Social class is fully responsible for Robbie's arrest.</i>

	<p>vi. <i>Beyond any doubt, Paul raped Lola and the latter is a genuine victim.</i> The problem with the above statements is not the position a reader may take vis-a-vis the novel but the failure to offer adequate evidence in the text to substantiate them.</p>
<p>A Handful of Dust 6a & 6b</p>	<p>Once again, none of the candidates opted for this novel.</p>
<p>Section B Prose Criticism</p>	<p>This year's Prose Criticism passage consisted of the two highly descriptive and contrasting paragraphs of the city of Chandrapore.</p> <p>In these paragraphs, Chandrapore is described in a detached and matter-of-fact style, and the narrator moves smoothly from a detailed description of the inner parts of downtown Chandrapore, to a portrayal of the inland part of Chandrapore as seen from above, and finally to a brief depiction of the functional and sanitary civil station, the part of the city inhabited by the non-natives, who are English.</p> <p>It is obvious to the careful reader that the narrator disapproves of the way Chandrapore appears so divided, the fact that the common people live in abject poverty, the scant value human life has in this place and the fact that the English settlers live in a salubrious spot out of sight and hearing of the Indians' misery and do little or nothing to ensure the people's welfare. Only, the narrator expresses his opinion through the use of irony and subtle innuendo rather than through accusations.</p> <p>Some of the subtleties present in this passage were, unfortunately, lost on most of this year's candidates, many of whom insisted on describing the narrator as either an environmentalist enthusiastically campaigning against urbanization or as an ardent philanthropist inveighing against neglectful governments for allowing their citizens to live and die in squalor. As is always the case when a passage in which irony features is chosen as a literary criticism text, the irony in the narrator's tone was lost on a good ninety per cent of the candidates. Most candidates failed to identify the rich, whimsical irony which features in such phrases as 'the Ganges happens not to be holy here' and 'the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there...'. As is usual in this section, this year's passage gave rise to a wide variety of answers attesting to a wide spectrum of aptitudes and levels of commitment to the task. The candidates' essays, though, can be broadly described as falling into three main categories. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Essays where the candidate was not only familiar enough with the techniques and aims of literary criticism but confident enough to use them in an analysis of the different literary elements which make up the text. Even where the results of the candidates' analysis were not particularly insightful, these were the candidates who addressed the question best – and, deservedly, the ones who were awarded the highest marks. ii. Essays which attested to some critical acumen on the candidate's part, which acumen, though, was not enough to make it possible for the candidate to strike off on their own. Thus, the candidate's critical comments were 'tacked on' to a sort of paragraph-by-paragraph summary of the text, giving rise to patchy work of inconsistent relevance and quality. iii. Essays which showed that the candidates did not very well know what

	<p>Literary Criticism is. Therefore, their answers consisted of a summary of the text, often accompanied by some pointless waffle by way of commentary.</p> <p>The essays in Group (ii) and those in Group (iii) tended to be characterised by an error which is common in Literary Criticism scripts at this level – the failure by candidates to provide examples to support their assertions. In some cases candidates stated points and simply moved on. No specific reference to the text was made to justify the assertion, and no supporting quotation provided.</p> <p>One of the aspects of the essays produced this year, which is particularly worrying, is the fact that several of them were very poorly structured. Candidates tended to omit Introductions or Conclusions (important features of any literary criticism essay) and plunged into the core of their analysis with no introduction to the task at hand or indication as to how the candidate intends to tackle it.</p> <p>Carelessness and lack of attention to (often salient) detail characterised many a candidate's work. Those candidates who tried to analyse the narrator's attitude in the text – rather than simply labelling him an environmentalist or a social reformer – tended to describe him as callous or indifferent. This evidences their failure to realize that, in this text, the writer is careful to cloak his concern and ire at the state of Chandrapore beneath a veneer of ironic detachment. This detachment <i>may</i> come across as somewhat cold but it is most definitely not a sign of indifference or lack of involvement – or, indeed, responsibility.</p> <p>Most candidates showed a good awareness of the contrast in content between the first and second paragraphs of the text; however, this was incorrectly described in terms of a change in tone. The following quotation closely resembles many other claims made by candidates: <i>The tone of the second paragraph is much more cheerful than that of the first, as it is rich in positive words like 'pleasance', 'noble' and 'glorify'.</i> Clearly, candidates did distinguish between lexis and tone. The fact that, in the first paragraph, the narrator makes use of lexis associated with drabness and poverty does not mean that his tone is dejected, mournful or pitying. Similarly, the fact that in the second paragraph the narrator is describing a much more pleasant prospect does not mean that, all of a sudden, he has become cheerful. It is true that, in the lines which describe the civil station, the irony which has characterised the narrator's tone from the beginning acquires an added sharpness ('[e]specially after the rains do they screen what passes below'; 'they glorify the city of the English people'; 'new-comers...have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment', etc.). Otherwise, the narrative tone does not change in the least in the second paragraph, remaining as poised, detached, ironic and superior as it was in the first.</p> <p>On a more positive note, most candidates identified the passage as a descriptive one and correctly attributed the length and sophistication of most of the sentences in the text to their descriptive function. Several candidates noted the narrator's use of personification in the text. Such instances of personification as 'nourish them' (l. 22), 'soar' (l. 23), 'greet one another', 'beckoning' and 'build a city' (l. 24) were singled out by several candidates.</p>
<p>PAPER III Section A Language Essay: General Comments</p>	<p>Many essays featured a number of careless formatting mistakes. Lines were skipped randomly and paragraphs were rarely denoted with either an indentation or a line space.</p> <p>Amongst the most common grammatical errors were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misuse of prepositions e.g. <i>my view at, at the future;</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frequent spelling mistakes of popular words, such as: <i>televition, murderer, there/their, democracy</i>, etc.; • inaccurate choice of vocabulary; • use of slang, for instance <i>wanna</i> and <i>hey</i> where formal register is expected. <p>A number of candidates wrote creatively and imaginatively proving that they are avid readers of various kinds of genres. Many candidates, however, were not able to adopt formal register and those essays which required such discipline were still written in the colloquial form.</p>
<p>Specific Comments:</p>	<p>The range of this year's language essay titles was certainly broad enough to appeal to candidates with varying writing abilities and styles. Out of the eight titles provided, the first was predominantly a narrative text type, whereas the second allowed candidates the possibility of creating a descriptive piece of writing, with the chance of slipping in an anecdote. Three of the remaining titles demanded essays with a discursive bent, while the title dealing with the World Cup could have been expounded upon in an evocative or more factual manner. Lastly, the two one-word titles donated the customary space to candidates of fabricating a story or embarking upon a debate of the topic at hand.</p> <p>The first title seemed to be attractive to a good number of candidates. Those who fared well with this title were able to put together a plausible account with the required cogency and good pacing. It cannot be emphasised enough that being able to weave together a sequence of events which was simultaneously credible and had a consistent structure was of the utmost importance for this title. Sadly, a fair percentage of the candidates who selected this topic were unable to follow through a cohesive plot structure, even if some of them commenced the story reasonably well. All too frequently, answers tended to become overwhelming due to the insistence of unnecessary details which provided needless digressions from the main storyline. Also, some candidates included extended dialogues, which often diverted from the story or served to add a 'twist in the tale', which never quite functioned in the way it was meant to. On a more positive note, some candidates demonstrated sufficient imagination to manipulate ideas and themes from well-known television shows, exhibiting innovation in their adeptness at fitting them to the title in question.</p> <p>The second was probably the next most popular selection for candidates. The notion of putting oneself in the place of a noted personality during an awards ceremony seems to have been an alluring one, a concept which is certainly comprehensible in this fame-obsessed, social media-determined age. The problems encountered in the tackling of this title were two – namely, the use of language and the focus on the specific content. The first occurred due to the tendency, shown by a number of candidates, to liberally sprinkle their essays with the kind of colloquial expressions and slang frequently experienced on, for example, an online blog or gossip magazine, or perhaps a television show featuring such an event. Such candidates seemed to be divorced from the idea that a current event which focuses on superficialities can, actually, be depicted in language appropriate to the task demanded of them. The lack of awareness of register comes as a disappointment, particularly when it is known that they are trained to make this distinction in another section of the examination. The second type of mishap related to the fact that a number of candidates devoted a good deal of space to the preparation leading up to the event, rather than the actual event itself.</p> <p>In the third title, candidates were able to express some of their hopes, frustrations</p>

and fears about the education system. As one would expect, most candidates drew on their own experiences for this title. The better answers tended to take a rounded view of what the concept of creativity signifies in today's world. Some candidates even began their piece of writing with a philosophical debate on the latter, progressing to the experience of creativity or otherwise in schools. Likewise, it could be noted that the more solid answers offered solutions to a number of problems which were highlighted, rather than simply launching a concerted criticism of teaching methods. The less desirable responses to this title took a much more limited approach, often merely choosing one side of the coin as far as their sympathies lay and adhering to it steadfastly.

The fourth title, focussing on the iconic Lego figures, engendered a far more intriguing response, not least in terms of the fact that but a handful of candidates were willing to tackle this title. The more successful attempts were able to adumbrate the need for adapting the Lego characters' personality traits to the current global mood, or zeitgeist.

The fifth title should have been a familiar topic indeed for Advanced level candidates with a supposedly broad knowledge of general linguistics, not to mention the fact that bilingualism should be accessible as a discussion topic for candidates residing on an island with two official languages. The first, rather shocking realisation accompanied the fact that some candidates seemed to be incapable of providing an accurate definition of the term itself, despite the abovementioned factors. A number of candidates fared poorly as far as providing rather trite and obvious incentives to being proficient in more than one language. Again, only some candidates seemed to be able to underline the global, as opposed to local, need for bilingualism. Once again, the more apposite answers possessed the capability of aligning their arguments with the broader economic situation, which they phrased in a cohesive and succinct manner.

Perhaps, as in the case of the first narrative essay, the two one-word essay titles delivered an extremely wide range of answers, the majority being – most unfortunately – unsatisfactory, rather than adequate. Again, this mainly appeared to centre around the inability of some candidates to develop their ideas in a sufficiently structured manner, with a lucid sequence of events and the requisite maturity of style. Also, notwithstanding the fact that the deployment of their imagination is encouraged, some elements of the content were far-fetched to the point of being ludicrous. Conversely, the candidates who eschewed narratives in favour of a debate-type of essay seemed to fare a great deal better.

The last title to be considered in this report – that is, the World Cup essay – evinced answers which were quite correct in as far as the content was concerned. Candidates who turned in disappointing answers for this title were let down by language-related mishaps, such as poor spelling and the incorrect use of verb tenses.

In conclusion, an overview of the answers evidenced in this session reveals that candidates tend to be more comfortable attempting discursive, rather than narrative, writing. The imaginative deployment of ideas was rife, but unhappily unchecked, at times, or let down by a poor development of notions. Language weaknesses ranged from spelling mistakes, even of words which were used in the title itself, such as "bilingualism", unwieldy syntax, the inappropriateness of language utilised for the task at hand, limited self-expression and errors concerning verb tenses, modal verbs, contractions and punctuation. Overall, however, the weak answers seemed to hover around the slightly below average mark, which is a definite improvement from the minimum levels of previous years.

vi. *In California, most people frequently have nightmares after an intense earthquake.*

<i>In California</i>	= Adverbial (place)
<i>most people</i>	= Subject
<i>frequently</i>	= Adverbial (time)
<i>have</i>	= Verb
<i>nightmares</i>	= Direct Object
<i>after an intense earthquake</i>	= Adverbial (time)

Knowledge of the constituent elements within a sentence is useful for candidates to improve their writing skills in terms of sentence structure.

In Task C (identifying sentence type and providing a reason to justify choice), some candidates managed to identify the type of sentence correctly but were unable to explain the reason for their choice. A few candidates had problems with the distinction between compound and complex sentences.

In general, most candidates who answered this question did very well, but there were a few who encountered difficulties as a result of their lack of knowledge / understanding of the linguistic basics / frameworks which constitute a “toolkit” for the analysis of language.

3 This was the *least popular option* for candidates (around 17% of candidates) and it was also the one in which performance ranged from unsatisfactory to good.

Some candidates **only** provided general comments concerning the typical features of the type of newspaper from which the article was taken (tabloid), without identifying specific examples taken from the text and explaining their effect. As such, there was very little attempt at analysing the set article in terms of the various features mentioned in the rubric, such as graphology, headlines, vocabulary, grammar, tone and bias, and discourse structure.

Others opted to focus on the content of the article by writing a paraphrase of what the incident was about without trying to identify and explain the various stylistic features which are characteristic of this kind of newspaper article. Thus their response, which in some cases was **shorter** than the prescribed limit, was mostly anecdotal and narrative rather than an exercise in stylistic analysis. It was clear that the candidates lacked the necessary knowledge of the linguistic terms required to comment on the use and effectiveness of particular features in the text.

However, there were some candidates who performed very well in this task. They were accurate in identifying and describing examples of particular linguistic features in the text and they clearly explained the effect of these features. Their response was written coherently and they made use of the appropriate linguistic terminology in their commentary.

In general, candidates' performance in this section (Linguistics) was satisfactory, though some need to develop their skills in learning how to **apply** the linguistic knowledge they have acquired (terminology and concepts) to the practical analysis of language at sentence and text level.

Oral

Following last year's success in the Oral component, the speaking tasks set were modelled on the same pattern. As a result, the three speaking tasks moved the candidates from a controlled set of questions to the more challenging long turn part where they are required to talk about a topic of their choice for 3 minutes.

Results showed that the questions, visuals and topics offered the candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their speaking skills within the allocated timeframe. As last year, no cases of ambiguity or bias were reported.

Part One (talking about oneself): the candidates' performance was satisfactory and they were able to engage with the task with minimal difficulty. The task observed the principle of the pre-long turn and behaved as a warm-up session. In fact, only a maximum of three marks may be awarded for this part.

Part Two (picture interpretation and topic): this part presents the candidate with a more challenging task, and a blend of visuals and topic specific questions are adopted. Candidates are expected to describe the visuals and then proceed to discuss a guided topic. As was noted last year, it seems that most candidates did not describe the visual prompt and instead, focussed on the theme generated by the prompt. In fact, there seems to be a recurring weakness.

Part Three (presentation): the topics selected were accessible and candidates had enough time to reflect and prepare the topic. The examiners reported that, generally, the candidates fared well but the overall structuring of the presentation and the signposting of ideas was rather weak, which means that candidates did not address this weakness even though it was highlighted in the last report. One other problem was noted, that is, some candidates might believe they possess a substantial amount of information when they select a topic, but often tend to exhaust their points in half the time requested for the long turn. It is important that candidates realise that the aim of the task is to engage in a 3 minute sustained talk on a topic of their choice.

*Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel*