



L-Università  
ta' Malta

MATSEC  
Examinations Board



# Examiners' Report

## AM English

First Session 2025

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## A. GENERAL PERFORMANCE

### Grade Distribution

GRADE	A	B	C	D	E	F	ABS	Total
NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	26	62	166	143	120	99	80	696
% OF TOTAL	3.7	8.9	23.8	20.5	17.2	14.2	11.5	100

*Table 1: Distribution of grades for English 2025 session*

GRADE	No. of Candidates	% of Candidates
A – C	255	36.6
A – E	517	74.3
Absent	80	11.5
Fail	99	14.2

*Table 2: Distribution of grades for English 2025 session*

### Number of Candidates and Absentees

This year, 696 candidates were registered for the exam, which is almost 100 candidates less than last year and the lowest number over the last 10 years. Despite this, English remains a very popular A-Level subject.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cand.	801	867	749	743	782	776	784	736	795	696

*Table 3: Number of candidates registered, by year*

As always, the number of candidates should be analysed in relation to absentees. This year, 11.5% of candidates (80) were absent for all components of the exam. This is less absentees than the 2020-22 period – which, for obvious reasons, had a high rate of nonattendance – but remains the second highest percentage since 2006 (the earliest available Examiners' Report; second to last year, at 11.8%). The absentee rate seems to have stabilised over the last three years.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cand.	5.1	5.4	5.5	9.3	18.2	14.6	18.2	11.4	11.8	11.5

*Table 4: Percentage of absentees, by year*

It is not very helpful to theorise about the absentee rate, as the reasons may be various and candidate-specific. However, the number is not insignificant, and bears noting.

### Introductory Evaluation of Results

This report begins with an evaluation of the candidates' general performance in the 2025 May session. The evaluation will be informed by candidates' general performance over the last ten years (2016-2025).

What is immediately apparent is that there is a continuation of the unfortunate trend whereby only a low percentage of candidates are able to achieve grade C or better (this year: 36.6%). Whilst an improvement over last year's 34.47%, and whilst this is not the lowest ever performance (2022, for instance, saw only 32.5% achieve grade C or better), this is nonetheless a marked decrease from, say, 2023 (38.7%). This percentage demonstrates, yet again, that expected and predictable weaknesses are not being successfully

addressed during the A Level's preparatory years, as well as, more worryingly and perhaps more accurately, during the candidates' holistic experience of English throughout their educational journey.

Indeed, comparing this year's performance to 2022 is no worthy benchmark, as 2022 was the lowest performing year in this 10-year sample. This year, then, marks yet another poor performance in the last ten years and, given the recency of this cluster of weak performances (2019, 2022, 2023, and 2024), we observe a worrying downward trajectory in candidates' ability to successfully demonstrate their skills within the realm of English Studies.

The idea that this downward trend is attributable to the exams' requirements and expectations is not feasible, not least because the previous years' exams, despite the syllabus change in 2020, have set very consistent expectations (with some necessary exceptions made during the pandemic years). Moreover, not only has this format demonstrated that there is ample space for excellent candidates to achieve excellent results (with 3.7% achieving an A grade this year, for instance), but there remains the fact that this downward trend began quite some time before the change in syllabus. 59.9% achieved a grade between D and F, which is significantly higher than the 53.7% of 2024 or the 49.9% of 2023. This is the highest percentage in the last 10 years.

At the same time, it is notable that there is a 4% increase in the average mark of candidates this year, despite roughly 100 candidates fewer. This means that this is an improvement over last year's 34.7% of candidates able to achieve grade C or better (this year, 36.6%), and brings us closer to the 38.7% of 2023. It must also be said that we have seen higher failure rates in the past when compared to this year (such as 20.53% in 2017, 18.8% in 2018, and 16.7% last year; compare to the 14.2% this year).

Let us remove absentees' impact on the percentage, which are factored in the preceding paragraph, and so enable ourselves to look at this year in a vacuum. What we have again this year is the disheartening fact that considerably *less than half* of the candidates who sit for the exam are able to achieve a Grade C or better (255 of 616 attending candidates, or 41.4%), and, consequently, considerably *more than half* are unable to do so (361 of 701 attending candidates, 58.6%). While a slight improvement over last year, these numbers remain quite staggering, and are worthy of pause.

Indeed, the examiners and markers of the different components of the exam have unilaterally agreed that this year's performance by the candidates was similarly less than average, and that this continues to indicate the downward trend in the candidates' performance in the exam over the last years.

In short, it may be observed that less and less candidates are proving able of achieving good to excellent results (Grades A through C) while more and more candidates are proving able of achieving a passing grade (Grades D and E). Because the interpretations of this statement are multifarious, it shall be left to the reader of this report to make of it what they will.

As will be discussed in more detail further down, some of the key issues which markers and examiners have highlighted as obstacles to achieving higher grades include:

- i. Unidiomatic and inaccurate use of written English, with errors ranging from the level of spelling and sentence structure to paragraphing and the organisation of ideas, and with evident weaknesses of vocabulary and L1 interference;

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- ii. Generally weak to very weak critical skills, most evident in the practical criticism components but visible throughout;
- iii. Little ability to go beyond identification (of plot points, literary devices, terminology) into the evaluative and insightful;
- iv. Lack of ability to respond to what the questions ask, instead repackaging rehearsed material in ways that are not relevant to the rubric (especially in Papers 1 and 2).

Discounting absentees and those candidates who did not attempt a particular section, the number of failures per section demonstrates our serious worries. Despite the marked improvement over last year – wherein 50% or more of candidates failed *four* sections – having 50% or more fail 2 sections of the exam is still worthy of serious rethinking. (These comprise the Summary section, with 58.4% failure, and the Unseen Prose, with 54.96% failure; absentees and candidates who did not attempt these sections and thus scored a 0 have not been considered in this calculation).

Predictably, and as last year, candidates did perform very well in their oral examinations, with only 1.81% of attending candidates being unable to achieve a passing grade (compared with 2.2%, last year). That said, even the majority of candidates who did pass nonetheless demonstrated somewhat strong L1 interference and weaknesses of grammar, fluency and coherence, vocabulary, and clarity.

In terms of written performance, the section in which candidates performed best was Paper 3, Section A: Language Essay, with “only” 13.42% of attending candidates offering failed attempts (compared to the 23.72% of last year).

Overall, we consider the results in 2025 as indicating a thought-provoking diminishment over the last few years in terms of the candidates' ability to achieve good grades, but also a marginal improvement in terms of candidates' ability to pass the exam (confirmed by the somewhat lower proportion of Grade F results and higher E and D grades). In the next sections, we will be looking at the candidates' performance in the three papers in detail. This will also give us the opportunity to identify those areas of the candidates' performance that are strong and those that require considerable improvement for future candidates to do better in next year's exam.

## B. ANALYSIS OF PAPERS

### Paper 1

#### 1.1 SECTION A: Shakespeare

Text Chosen	Question	Number of Essays*
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1a	1
	1b	1
	1c	1
<i>Othello</i>	2a	73
	2b	133
	2c	392

Table 5: The number of essays\* marked for this component. Absent candidates and candidates who attended the exam but did not attempt this question are not included.

#### *Romeo and Juliet*

##### *1a. Gobbet and 1b. Violence and tragedy and 1c. Generational clash*

Only one candidate attempted each of the above three questions. No comments on the candidate's performance may be given. Any attempt to comment will jeopardise the candidate's privacy.

#### *Othello*

##### *2a. Gobbet*

The stronger essays concentrated on the characters of Iago and Othello, and effectively explored the themes of jealousy and manipulation. Many candidates also examined the symbolic significance of the handkerchief and the evolution of Othello's language. However, the majority of candidates did not perform well. The main weaknesses observed were as follows:

- i. Many candidates failed to identify the context of the passage accurately. When context was provided, it was often vague, indicating an inability to pinpoint the passage's exact location. For instance, most candidates identified the extract as occurring during Iago's manipulation of Othello into believing that Desdemona was unfaithful — a development that spans nearly all of Act 3, Scene 3, and continues into part of Act 4. A significant number mistakenly claimed it was from Act 3.
- ii. A major issue was the failure of many candidates who chose this question to focus on the extract itself. Instead, they discussed character and theme from the broader play, with minimal reference to the passage in question.
- iii. Essay planning was weak in several cases, resulting in disorganised ideas and a lack of coherent structure.

##### *2b. Language and deterioration in Othello.*

Only a handful of candidates produced very good essays in response to this question. Many chose to discuss Othello's character development— from his initial portrayal, through his manipulation, to his tragic

end —without focusing on the evolution of his language. Among those who did address his language, most provided very few examples and lacked sufficient textual references to support their analysis.

### *2c. Theme of reputation in Othello*

Most candidates who chose this question focused on Iago, Cassio, and Othello, with some also exploring the theme of reputation in relation to Brabantio, Bianca, and Desdemona. Overall, the content of these essays was generally sound. However, in many cases, marks were lost due to a lack of illustration — particularly regarding Othello's reputation. While candidates often stated that he was well-regarded at the beginning of the play, this claim was frequently unsupported by textual evidence. Few demonstrated how Othello tried to restore his reputation at the end of the play.

Not all the candidates who chose to focus on the character of Iago, addressed his reputation as an 'honest' man. As a result, their discussions lacked relevance to the specific demands of the question.

Furthermore, unfortunately, some candidates misunderstood the rubric, focusing on the quote about reputation from the play — provided as an introduction — rather than addressing the theme of reputation itself as the essay required. It was also evident that some candidates had prepared an essay focused on honour and reputation, and consequently addressed both themes in their response.

### *Some general comments on weaknesses:*

1. **Weak Syntax:** As was also observed in 2024, candidates consistently demonstrated a weak command of language, as reflected in awkward sentence construction and unclear expression. In many cases, sentences were so poorly formed that they became difficult to understand.
2. **Narration:** A significant number of candidates relied on narrative summary rather than engaging in analytical discussion in their essays.
3. **Poor Textual Reference and Quotation:** There were candidates who failed to engage closely with the text, and some included inaccurate quotations.
4. **Spelling:** Numerous candidates exhibited spelling errors, commonly misspelling words such as "villain" as "villian", "led" as "lead" (in past tense), "Venetian" as "Venician", "deceive" as "decieve", "whose" as "who's", "jealousy" as "jaelousy", "beginning" as "beging", "tragedy" as "tradegy" or even as "tradgedy", "losing" as "loosing", and even "Shakespeare" as "Shakespear."
5. **Formatting Errors:** Despite clear instructions in the syllabus appendix to underline play titles, most candidates overlooked this guideline, often enclosing titles in inverted commas or underlining them with inverted commas. Additionally, some candidates incorrectly referred to "Othello" as a novel.

### *Grammatical inaccuracies:*

- i. **Possessives:** Some essays lacked correct usage of possessives. For instance, there were a good number of candidates who used an 's when they were referring to the possessive of a plural noun, for instance "the character's reputations" instead of "the characters' reputations".
- ii. **Prepositions:** Incorrect prepositions were used, such as "in the beginning/start of the play."

- iii. **Subject-Verb Agreement:** There were instances of incorrect subject-verb agreement, such as: “The introduction to Othello as a soldier and as a loving husband lead to a change...”
- iv. **Tenses:** Candidates displayed inconsistent tense usage, often switching between past and present within the same sentence. For instance, “Cassio was charismatic and he has the looks” and “he cannot bear his own action and turned the sword...”
- v. **Incorrect Structure:** Numerous essays contained this type of error -: “Othello, still believing his wife to be honest, he tells Iago...”
- vi. **Relative Pronoun Misuse:** “Which” was incorrectly used instead of “who” when referring to a person.

## 1.2 SECTION B: Set Poetry

Poet	Question Number	Number of Essays*
Elizabeth Bishop	1a	5
	1b	4
Carol Ann Duffy	2a	150
	2b	90
Seamus Heaney	3a	185
	3c	159

Table 6: The number of essays\* marked for this component. Absent candidates and candidates who attended the exam but did not attempt this question are not included.

### General Note

The question format this year offered some help to the candidates by having a named poem in one of the two options. This was meant to elucidate candidates on what was expected of them.

### Elizabeth Bishop

Only nine candidates chose Elizabeth Bishop, versus last year’s five candidates, so any comment on the candidates’ general performance is still perhaps not an entirely representative one. The only relevant comment to make is that while the treatment of Bishop’s poetry in these instances also generally followed the same patterns as with Duffy and Heaney, to wit, a shade too biographical, the general performance was a slight margin better than that of candidates who wrote about Duffy and Heaney.

### Carol Ann Duffy

The general performance, both for the first question concerning empathy in Carol Ann Duffy’s poetry, and the second question concerning the poet’s former role as the British Poet Laureate vis-à-vis her expressing the concerns of the nation, was generally subpar.

There were two chief overarching reasons for this: (a) the answers often involved a complete focus on one part of the question to the exclusion of any pertinent qualifiers, showcasing a determination to regurgitate the candidates’ learning by rote (chief among these was an undue focus on the *dramatic monologue* form which was not even mentioned in either of the questions, with this undue focus on what the candidates

were presumably drilled in leading to a detrimental effect on the shaping of the answer to the question); and (b) the generally abysmal handling of the English language.

Further to this, in Duffy's case, there was, as in the previous year's case, an undue focus on Duffy's gender and sexuality, i.e. the fact that she is a woman and queer, with primacy being given to these biographical facts to the detriment of an already weak appreciation of her poetry. For instance, there was a surprisingly large number of candidates who chose to indicate at the start of their essay the correct birthplace (an inconsequential biographical fact vis-à-vis the poetry itself) of the poet — Gorbals, Glasgow — but who could not offer an equally correct elucidation of the poet's work. This, perhaps, might suggest a deeper issue with the way Duffy's poetry is being taught. Literary criticism terms learned by rote were almost always haphazardly used and did not add much to the interpretation and argument. Furthermore, the poet was often referred to interchangeably with her personae — candidates often assumed that there was no distinction between the two, further emphasising the biographical angle while also failing to actually engage with the general tenor of the questions.

To sum up, Duffy was treated with a startling lack of nuance by the majority of candidates, most often as a poet who uses her poetry as a springboard for uttering self-evident truths without the poetic depth that is the ultimate core and substance of her poetry.

### *Seamus Heaney*

As with Duffy, the performance of candidates who chose Heaney was very subpar.

The first question concerned Heaney's treatment of hardship and suffering, while the second question concerned a comment made by Heaney with regard to the link between bodily sensations and memory. Unfortunately, both these questions laid open to the candidates a wholly biographical approach to answering the question, much to the detriment of the actual analysis of the poetry chosen and the comprehensive answering of the question.

In again — as with Duffy — mixing Heaney and his personae, Heaney was transmogrified into a totem pole adorned with emblems of personal suffering and hardship, specifically with regard to the first question. The second question featured a significant majority of candidates who chose to focus on only one major aspect of the question that had to be answered, to wit, *memory*, forsaking altogether, or almost, the link with bodily sensations; moreover, *memory* was often brought up, often from the very beginning, specifically in relation to *childhood memories* rather than memory in toto. Again, this points to the critical problem that is being exhibited in the answers, namely the detrimental effects of learning by rote: the candidates stick with what they seemingly know, with what they were seemingly taught, and will try to pry open an entry into a question with what they were *taught by rote* rather than trying to relate it with the broader aspects of what they were *taught generally* and what they *should know generally* about poetry and the poet in question. This is tantamount to an inability to read text carefully in all its senses, which is after all a major aspect to be considered and assessed in this context. This inability made itself manifest more often than desired both in the reading of the exam questions and in the reading of the poetry.

To sum up, the treatment of Heaney's poetry in both questions was subpar, and there was minimal to zero engagement with the actual poetic substance of his texts; the candidates merely replicated, most often

inefficiently and inelegantly, baseline facts and signposts that related, somehow, vaguely, or nebulously, to the questions asked.

*Some general comments on weaknesses:*

While some briefer points in this regard are provided below, it should be remarked that, yet again, the candidates' overall use of language leaves much to be desired even from an elementary perspective. It is startling to see certain repeated errors, especially as regards the most basic verb forms, the most basic punctuation, the most basic syntactical considerations — let alone any considerations of idiomatic use of language, parallel construction, precise diction, and so forth. Almost none of the candidates wrote at a level that suggests an ability to be able to gradually, let alone swiftly, shift to writing at an undergraduate level.

- i. General tendency to merely paraphrase;
- ii. The chosen poems were most often discussed *separately* and never in *relation* to each other;
- iii. Strict focus on text — nothing outside the text in terms of conceptual ideas, personal takes, etc. were brought to bear;
- iv. Very little, or almost absent, focus on any literary devices, which might indicate a lack of understanding of them;
- v. Almost all the candidates stuck to the specified minimum of 3 poems, possibly indicated a limited repertoire/confidence;
- vi. Syntax was very poor across the board except for the very few who excelled;
- vii. Surprising lack of grasp of the most basic forms of punctuation, including full stops and commas (let alone between semi-colons and colons);
- viii. Mixing/interchangeable use of the poetic persona and the poet-author;
- ix. Lots of non-idiomatic English, including some direct translations from Maltese;
- x. Spelling across the board was quite poor, sometimes extremely poor given the standard required at this level (common examples included “throught” instead of “throughout”, and “empaty” instead of “empathy”, even though the latter was quite inexcusable since it formed part of question 2a);
- xi. Verb tenses were often incorrectly deployed;
- xii. A substantial number of candidates do not know how to use the possessive;
- xiii. Capitalisation was also an issue;
- xiv. Paragraphing was also another issue, leaving many essays with a disjointed feel;
- xv. The quality of handwriting leaves much to be desired.

### **1.3 SECTION C: Poetry Criticism**

In many cases, candidates failed to identify the context and background of this poem. Some candidates realised that it was a war poem but were still confused as to who the speaker was, taking the titular owl as the persona, whereas the poem's voice was that of a soldier. Many candidates wrote the entire essay in a very vague manner, not alluding to themes or messages but simply engaged into a blind analysis.

The themes of survivor's guilt, the complexities of war and survival, the surreal and traumatic aftermath of war and PTSD, and the notion of empathy and the feeling of betrayal through survival was only identified by a small percentage of candidates.

In most cases, candidates did identify the juxtapositions and contrasts in the poem; however very few, if any, associated these contrasts with the paradox of war and the issue of guilt. Fewer still identified that these contrasts were not "oxymorons" or "opposites" but great unease on the part of the soldier who was suffering from confusion, shock or the first inklings of insanity or imbalance following the trauma of war. These latter states impeded the soldier from enjoying the respite at the refuge or inn, flooding the soldier's mind with overwhelming feelings of betrayal and guilt at having survived when so many had perished and were still suffering. A very small percentage of candidates discussed the extended implication that war did not only translate into casualties, but mental trauma which followed the end of the fighting and affected survivors for the rest of their lives.

When it came to the analysis of literary language and poetic devices, for the most part, candidates were able to identify imagery, proliferating this into a wide range of imagery genres, as well as caesurae and enjambments, with fewer succeeding in commentary about the extended owl and salt metaphors. Anaphoras and anastrophe were rarely mentioned, with the latter referred to as 'word inversion'. What is worth noting is that a high percentage of candidates gave a list of figures of speech, yet failed to mention the meaning intended through the employment of such literary devices. There seems to be a disconnect. This is a factor which needs more instruction. The discussion of the distinctive use of language was somewhat superficial with a high number of candidates simply dismissing this important aspect as 'the poem uses simple language' with a concerning small percentage of candidates even mentioning that there were no particular figures of speech or literary devices employed.

A very small percentage of candidates identified the significance of the owl and its cries in the poem, which foreground the poem through the poem title. Only a few candidates succeeded in explaining the powerful metaphor/symbolism/motif of the owl as the trigger or deictic shift of sorts, for the soldier's consciousness to shift from receiving warmth and sustenance in the inn or refuge, to the brothers-in-arms left on the battlefield either still in arms, or as corpses. This was expressed in a somewhat superficial and rudimentary manner. A high percentage of candidates interpreted the owl to signify a reminder for the soldier of the power of nature, interpolating the theme of nature and also stating that the poet intended for the reader to see a comparison between the life of the owl and that of the soldier, where they felt in a similar way. This is not one of the messages of the poem, or intention of the poet.

Most candidates were able to identify that the poem consists of four quatrains with an ABCB rhyme scheme and several attempted to interpret the reason for this rhyme scheme, associating this to the enjambments, caesurae and punctuation used in the poem to represent marching soldiers or the breathing of the soldier. Essays were formatted in paragraphs and, for the most part, work was presented in an orderly manner.

Perhaps one of the most concerning aspects was the low standard of expression, fluency, flow, verbosity, use of complex sentences, and mature language observed. The overall level of expression was considerably lower than that expected at Advanced Level; this demonstrates a lack of proficiency in the use of English, the inability to develop an argument in a scaffolded way by employing an erudite and elegant register and

a reflective approach, which is what appreciation should be about. Quite simply put, these essays lacked the essayistic element to them.

For the most part, grammar and spelling were of an acceptable and expected standard, with the major weaknesses being the over-simplified, superficial expression and lack of depth and scale as well as excessive paraphrasing, repetition, irrelevant statements, filler material and superfluous elementary observations which lacked depth and personal commentary; this reveals an issue with personal engagement with the text. Coherence was often jeopardised and so much of the writing found in these essays is clouded by vague and unclear statements and a lack of trajectory and argument clarity.

Very few candidates presented an essay in which it was felt that there was a sensitivity to the themes, meanings and messages and distinctive aspects of the poem. This in turn was further hindered by the general feeling of a stark inability to express oneself in an advanced level of linguistic expression and critical thinking to produce a respectful essay. The weakest areas were the poem's themes and message interpretation and appreciation, the appreciation of meaning derived from the employment of literary devices and the standard of expression. Perhaps one last comment would refer to the evident lack of fluency and captivating writing skills, which would explain why a high percentage of these essays were hard to read. Creative writing skills and evaluative fluent expression appear to be the most prevalent weaknesses.

## Paper 2

### 2.1 SECTION A: Set Novels

Novel	Question	Number of Essays*
Margaret Atwood	1a	367
	1b	200
Charles Dickens	2a	1
	2b	0
Ian McEwan	3a	402
	3b	41
Emily Bronte	4a	165
	4b	112
Harper Lee	5a	0
	5b	3

*Table 7: The number of essays\* marked for this component. Absent candidates and candidates who attended the exam but did not attempt this question are not included.*

### General Comments

In recent years, there has been observed, on average, low levels of language and structure, limited argumentation, and a preference for narration over presenting an idea and a guided explanation per paragraph. While this remains prevalent at the Advanced Level, it appears that this year's cohort was slightly better equipped to provide adequate responses to the examination questions.

As in previous sessions, essays answering the more open question (such as 1a) came across as more superficial and less focused, with candidates opting to present general information about the novel in the

form of lists (a string of unrelated sentences occasionally paragraphed). What stood out noticeably in the majority of essays answering 1a was inefficient essay structuring. Not even the most standard Point-Evidence-Explanation (PEE) format was present with essays including lists of examples (narration/quotes) or facts without further explanation.

It is evident that candidates prepare for their exam by trying past papers, leading them to memorise answers or quotes such as 'ignorance is not the same as ignoring' or 'freedom from' and 'freedom to', without indicating any in-depth understanding of the context of such quotes. This was especially the case for essays answering open questions like (1a), as these were typically littered with such quotes, which were broadly used to indicate the oppression of the Handmaids.

The open question, asking candidates for a response 'without focusing exclusively on Offred', seemed to confuse candidates who either opted to present Offred's experience without naming her (generalising her experience) or cut her out for the most part. Some candidates also struggled to understand 'symbols of resistance' and either focused entirely on oppression or heavily narrated instances of resistance by Offred, Ofglen, or Moira. Once again, candidates fell into the trap of regurgitating phrases such as 'victims of oppression' or 'symbols of resistance' throughout essays, indicating a poor understanding of these terms. Based on how the candidates answered this year's open question, it appears that many felt that the entire novel could be used to exemplify 'victims of oppression and symbols of resistance', resulting in many excessively long essays of narration. This is especially disappointing as the candidates demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of the novel but score very low in their ability to structure their writing, produce argumentation, and provide a relevant and direct response to the question.

Conversely, essays answering the more focused question (such as 1b) came across as more focused, as limiting the breadth of information they needed to present allowed them to delve deeper into the question. The question itself was very clear and almost indicated a trajectory of how the essay should be laid out (50/50 on personal and societal loss). There were fewer instances of narration, and candidates were much better able to present well-rounded argumentation. Notably, essays answering this question presented fewer direct quotations; however, candidates put more effort into providing context for the quotes and positioning them clearly into their points.

Worth considering is that the open question is still preferred over the focused question, with two-thirds of candidates opting for it. Across the board, few attempted to provide context to quotes or develop argumentation around them (especially observed for 1a). Unlike last year, there were fewer instances of incomplete or short essays. Essays answering question 1a were typically longer than those answering 1b; however, most reached or exceeded the 500-word mark across the board.

Still, as in previous years, originality, relevance, and depth within the presented arguments are the major areas that need improvement. Candidates focus too much on narrating scenes rather than explaining what the scenes reveal about the story and what techniques the author uses to express a particular point. The same facts are repeated across essays without any critical analysis, suggesting that candidates are not being prepared to think but rather to remember. There is hardly any metacommentary, deeper observations, or evidence of close reading of the text. Overall, there were fewer misquotes; however, a significant portion of candidates still wrote Margaret as Margret/Magret, which demonstrates poor attention to detail, especially considering the author's name is provided in the exam question.

Given the very low number of candidates, if any, who attempted to respond to questions about Charles Dickens or Harper Lee, no commentary is given on these hereunder.

*Margaret Atwood*

*1a. Handmaids: victims of oppression/symbols of resistance*

As noted previously, this question was relatively unclear/challenging, given the most instances of irrelevant or out-of-point essays. Essays focused exclusively on Offred, or generalising Offred's specific experience while keeping her unnamed, or even described the situation of oppression and resistance broadly for all women in Gilead (sometimes also including the Commander's oppression/resistance). A few essays also picked between oppression or resistance to focus on rather than the specific role of the Handmaids.

For the most part, the essays read the same way, without much attempt to form an argument that answers the question directly. Essays typically reflected unstructured arguments and thought, listing random quotes or narrating the story from scratch, poorly splitting entire essays into three chunks (introduction – body – conclusion), or simply swamping a paragraph with too many facts/anecdotes.

Narration was a clear pitfall for essays answering this question, leading to unfocused writing, limited or no argumentation, and a lack of structure for the most part. This suggests that candidates generally had relatively good knowledge and understanding of the novel but were unprepared to select key points in the novel to present a compelling argument answering the question (which in and of itself should not have been hard to do since the question does not actually ask anything unheard of from them).

*1b. The theme of loss*

As the focused question, which still clearly had plenty of room to discuss other themes related to loss, candidates answering this question performed particularly well compared to those answering 1a. Essays for 1b were typically closer to the 500-word mark, and as there were fewer issues with understanding the question, candidates were less likely to regurgitate the title, or chunks of it, in their writing. Essays typically had better flow but had fewer direct quotations overall.

*Ian McEwan*

*3a. Robbie and Paul and 3b. Role of memory*

Candidates opted mostly for question 3(a). Candidates showed repetitive and quite-irrelevant knowledge and appreciation for the fountain scene, and other than this, plot narration featured in the majority of scripts. The attempts here frequently demonstrated a lack of command of basic grammar and sentence structure. Many such examples abound ("Brioney", "Atonement", "quiet"/"quite", wrong past-tenses used, etc.).

Irrespective of the question chosen, candidates showed fairly average knowledge of the novels under discussion, which shows some reading (if not of the main text itself, of some summary or thematic study). The majority of scripts evinced average knowledge of texts, but little critical thinking or evidence of conceiving concepts other than plot narration.

*Emily Bronte*

*4a. Relationships with Heathcliff and 4b. Experiences of grief*

Candidates rarely identified more than a handful of instances of actions, emotions, imagery, language use, and symbolism that could have been brought in to bear on their responses, and often constricted themselves into a superficial narration of some of the more obvious plot points.

Candidates in their majority opted for question 4(a). The great majority of the candidates provided surface treatment of the thematics. However, even this was not nearly as depressing as the misspelling of names from the novel itself: "Truscross Grange" and "Heatclif" are some of the more glaring ones that resurface year after year. Candidates seem to have, in large numbers, promised themselves to write a pre-prepared essay irrespective of the title at hand, and this is what they largely did.

**2.2 SECTION B: Prose Criticism**

Overall, this year's candidates performed noticeably better than the previous year, particularly in their ability to interpret and analyse the text rather than fall into the trap of narrative retelling. The nature of the passage — chosen specifically to be almost entirely descriptive and largely devoid of conventional plot — encouraged candidates to focus on literary analysis and thematic interpretation, and this was reflected in many responses. While a small number of essays still resorted to rewording parts of the text, this was far less common than in previous sessions.

A clear improvement was seen in candidates' engagement with the language of the passage. Many essays included thoughtful interpretations supported by well-chosen textual references. Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of the distinctive atmosphere of the piece and many identified its central thematic concerns — most notably the ever-present notion of death and man's insignificance in the face of nature's vastness. Several candidates quoted the coffin or the descriptions of the men in the wilderness and commented on the physical and symbolic scale of the landscape. Several perceptively inferred the contrast between the smallness of man and the all-consuming, indifferent, almost evil expanse of the Wild.

A recurring feature in many responses was the recognition of personification through the capitalisation of 'the Wild,' with many candidates identifying this as a deliberate technique that elevated the natural world into a dominant, almost sentient force within the prose. However, when it came to discussing other literary devices, there was still a tendency in some essays to present these as a list, with little consideration given to how they operated within the text or contributed to its effect. That said, a good number of candidates managed to balance breadth and depth, mentioning a wide range of techniques and analysing their function within the passage — these essays were often impressive in both insight and control.

In terms of the structural elements of prose, many candidates did refer to the text's point of view, though in a significant number of cases this was only mentioned in the introduction and then left undeveloped. Very few discussed the effect of narrative perspective in depth. Similarly, the role of characterisation was widely misunderstood. While characters were mentioned in the passage, only a small number of candidates grasped that this was the introduction to a longer narrative, with character details intentionally obscured by the overwhelming presence of setting. Many treated the passage as a standalone piece and concluded that there was no characterisation at all — seeing 'the Wild' as the only "character" present.

Only a handful recognised that the figures in the text, though present, were intentionally consumed by their environment, foreshadowing the narrative to come.

Despite these improvements, some of the familiar issues from previous years did persist. A noticeable number of candidates referred to the passage as a “poem” and, though fewer than last year, some still called the writer “the poet.” These lapses in terminology were often accompanied by references to poetic devices more suited to verse than prose, suggesting that some candidates continue to conflate textual analysis of prose with poetry criticism.

Structurally, most essays followed a logical format, with a brief introduction, focused body paragraphs and a concluding statement. However, as in previous years, some candidates attempted to moralise in their conclusions — claiming that the piece was written to encourage readers to appreciate life or cherish their loved ones. These interpretations were rarely supported by textual evidence and revealed a superficial engagement with the deeper themes of the text.

While the general standard of writing was markedly higher this year, the range remained broad. The best essays were perceptive, well-organised, and confidently written. A few even demonstrated near-professional command of literary criticism. At the other end of the spectrum, however, some responses were incomprehensible, incoherent, and in a number of cases, entirely illegible — a reminder that the ability to formulate ideas is inseparable from the clarity with which they are communicated.

### Paper 3

#### 3.1 SECTION A: Language Essay

This year’s paper offered eight options to candidates with a choice of narrative, descriptive, expository, discursive and argumentative essay titles:

Language Essay	Number of Essays*
<b>Title 1 (Narrative)</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Title 2 (Open-Ended)</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Title 3 (Open-Ended)</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Title 4 (Discursive)</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Title 5 (Discursive)</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Title 6 (Argumentative)</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Title 7 (Factors)</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Title 8 (Problem-and-Solution)</b>	<b>70</b>

*Table 8: The number of essays\* marked for this component. Absent candidates and candidates who attended the exam but did not attempt this question are not included.*

#### *Comments on each title:*

**Title 1 (Narrative):** The focus was on escape rather than adventures; those who focused on adventures did not do so fully in the plural. However, there have been a number of creative and ambitious tales and language use (‘shrivelled’, ‘clenching’). Some errors included: wrong use of punctuation (e.g., ‘in all the hamsters in the world’; ‘he was taken away to humans’); incomplete sentences, using “which” instead of

who or whom; lack of punctuation in possession ('humans' instead of 'human's'). Errors in idiomatic language ('the cage got opened') and featuring basic vocabulary ('nice').

**Title 2 (Open-Ended):** There were a number of ambitious, well-written essays for this title. Of note was the use of evocative imagery, sensorial vocabulary, and use of literary devices; overall, responses veered towards the genre of description without falling into clichéd narratives. Examples of good language use: 'trees stand tall swaying from side to side'; 'the rough and angry sea'; vocabulary such as 'hovering', 'unforgiving', 'bashes'; 'an amused laugh'; 'my misting eyes darting up towards the fading sky'.

**Title 3 (Open-Ended):** This essay was the least favoured amongst candidates; among those who opted for it, the majority wrote adequate narratives. However, the build-up usually took up most of the narratives. The strong responses were interesting and managed to stay away from clichéd plots.

**Title 4 (Discursive):** Some discursive essays were out of point, equating free will with gaining material things to be like others. Free will was also equated with freedom and easy living. The strong essays discussed the different facets of free will, concluding that complete free will is highly improbable in a society with rules and laws. The stronger essays discussed free will from a philosophical and theory-based perspective, quoting seminal names such as Sartre, Frankl, and Camus (clearly linked with philosophy studies).

Some errors such as spelling and subject-verb agreement: 'dependance', 'activities which decreases'.

**Title 5 (Discursive):** Confusing the topic with a focus on influencers rather than attention- and admiration-seeking. The use of language such as 'positive and negative aspects', 'pros and cons'. Fragmented sentences or lack of control of sentence structure. Errors: 'essentiality', 'neverendless', 'de-influence', 'genuin review', 'recepies', 'persieved'.

**Title 6 (Discursive):** Most candidates adopt one perspective and only present the opposing position towards the end. Arguments brought forward are mostly valid, cohesive, and pertinent to the topic, such as the ethical and moral aspects, physical and psychological suffering, and human selfishness at the detriment of animal well-being. Errors: 'instict', 'zoo's' instead of zoos, 'in which it escaped'.

**Title 7 (Factors):** Candidates who chose this topic presented a number of sound, logical factors contributing to the decline in reading, with quite a few offering suggestions on how to improve the situation. Of note, a number of essays' introduction feature the three-part list, a cohesive device: 'This issue originated from sources such as the extensive use of social media, lack of parental guidance, and a disinterest in broader subjects beyond those imposed by schools'.

Maltese-English expressions were noted: prefer 'to stay playing'. Spelling issues: 'prefare'; 'oppinion'; 'ammount'; 'sixteen to nineteen years olds' without the -; 'effecting' instead of 'affecting'.

Errors: informal style ('we can do more apps'; 'I do believe that this is happening due to everyone being stuck to their phone'); awkward collocations: 'abstaining them from sitting down'; 'in result of this'.

**Title 8 (Problem-and-solution):** Candidates who opted for the essay on academic pressure focused on factors such as loaded school timetables, not enough free time, a toll on mental and physical health, and societal and family expectations. They then went on to propose solutions, some of which were superficial,

whereas others were interesting and showed reflection. Many candidates spoke from personal experience but managed to keep the style formal overall. There was a mixture of styles between formal and informal – using the informal 'you'.

Spelling mistakes: 'stundents'; 'experience'; 'asseses'; 'corrispondence'; 'accedemic'; 'In todays academic system' and 'lets take' – lack of punctuation; 'our childhood and early adulthood passes by super fast'; 'were' instead of where; awkward collocations: 'would give less academic stress'.

### *General observations*

Overall, this session's cohort presented satisfactory and adequate language essays in terms of content, language use, and development of ideas. Improvements were noted in the descriptive genre, with some pieces being quite creative and imaginative. The most popular choices were the titles on free will and a decline in reading, which spurred quite a good number of interesting essays, demonstrating maturity and critical thinking. However, there still needs to be more work on the handling and control of sentence structure, style (such as differentiating between formal and informal), and content development beyond the obvious in some cases.

### **3.2 SECTION B: Summary**

An introductory observation in last year's report on the candidates' performance in the summary task reads: 'candidates had no major problem comprehending the source text and identifying most of the salient points, but candidates' efforts also confirmed some of the shortcomings in summary writing already noted by examiners in previous reports.' One could easily start by making the same observation re the candidates' performance in this year's summary task. The topic was definitely not alien to the candidates, and generally speaking, candidates understood the arguments in the source text. However, as will be explained, their understanding (one could possibly even say familiarity with the subject) did not necessarily work in their favour, or was not used well by the candidates.

As the title itself suggests, the source text was primarily concerned with the redundancy of the Disney prince. The constant shift from princesses to princes in the text exists to repeatedly underscore the unimportance of the prince in the Disney narrative. The better summaries were the ones which foregrounded the prince and handled the shift from the arguments concerning the princesses to the princes in a coherent manner particularly through the correct use of linking words that sustained the distinct relationship between the evolution of the Disney princess and prince. In contrast, the weaker candidates missed foregrounding the prince, and, even worse, wrote statements about the princesses and princes which, though correct, evidenced no immediate relationship between them. Unfortunately, this led to many summary paragraphs not going beyond a series of disjointed sentences about princesses and princes leading to paragraphs lacking cohesion and coherence. This was, without doubt, the major weakness in most of the efforts. Several candidates did feel they needed to maintain the relationship between what they were writing about the princesses and the princes, however (and this was rather surprising) there were too many instances when linking words were used incorrectly. For example, introducing a sentence with 'Furthermore' when the idea/s in that sentence is/are not an extension of the previous sentence, or starting a sentence with 'Contrastingly' when idea in that sentence is simply a new point and not some contrast to the previous idea/s. Other linking words were used incorrectly.

While it was evident the topic was not particularly challenging for the candidates, there were two issues regarding 'salient points' that stood out. One was the introduction into the summary of ideas/details that were not in the source text, but which candidates obviously knew because of their knowledge of the topic outside the given source text (for example, mentioning the fairy godmother solving Cinderella's problem/s when writing about characters helping the protagonist rather than the prince). This was wrong. A second problem was the imprecise interpretation of some of the ideas in the passage. So, for example, many candidates were weak in their explanation of the Jasmine phenomenon in relation to Aladdin being the story's protagonist. Many missed the point the text makes and/or interpreted Jasmine's success as something of her own making. Similar inaccuracies appeared in the candidates' efforts when they wrote about the Beauty and the Beast relationship. Also, some candidates were not crisp in their writing of the early inferior roles of the princes despite some slight achievements they may have managed. Rather than the 'bolder' points, it was the finesse of the arguments that several candidates missed or ignored.

Too many candidates persist in losing marking because they continue to lift phrases directly from the source text when the ideas in those phrases can easily be expressed using different words. Some summaries were nothing more than a collation of phrases/even sentences from the source text that candidates probably highlighted in their reading of the passage. Also, too many candidates seem to have sat for the examination without enough preparation in (in some instances one would dare say even awareness of) writing 150 to 200-word summary paragraphs. Candidates may need to be reminded that each summary is counted for the number of words and summaries with more or less words than expected incur a loss of marks. In this session, rather unusually, there were too many summary paragraphs with less words. What was also particular about this was that candidates wrote down their number of words (less than 150 words) as if they were not aware that such short summaries were not according to the rubric. One hopes that in their preparation candidates are working with source texts of about 600 words and writing summaries of between 150 and 200 words.

### 3.3 SECTION B: Linguistics

QUESTION	NUMBER OF RESPONSES*
1 (Tasks x4)	283
2 (Essay)	124
3 (Newspaper Article Analysis)	191

*Table 9: The number of essays\* marked for this component. Absent candidates and candidates who attended the exam but did not attempt this question are not included.*

#### *General Comments:*

In this examination session, taking into consideration candidates' performance in all three questions, there was a similar result to that obtained in the Linguistics section of 2024. To be exact, there was a very slight increase in those who obtained an excellent result (5.4% this year as opposed to 4.68% last year), and those who got a very good result (16.5% this year against the 15.06 of 2024), but then there was a marked dip in performance among those who got a good result (28% this year and 34.6 % last year). Those who got a poor result this year were slightly higher (19.7%) than those who achieved an equivalent score last year (16.6%). Those who achieved poor results were higher (31.2 %) than those who fared poorly last year (29%). In general, one can say that there was a slight dip in performance this year when compared to last

year. Similarly, there were more candidates who achieved a mediocre to poor result this year. Once again, the preferred choice of question was Question 1 – Tasks/Exercises (47.3% opted for this).

### *QUESTION 1: FOUR TASKS/EXERCISES*

This type of question involves a number of specific tasks/exercises intended to gauge candidates' knowledge and understanding of various linguistic terms, elements, concepts and aspects that are explained and described in some of the six topics of Area 1 of the syllabus. Candidates are expected to identify/describe/define/explain the selected linguistic terms and elements. They may also be required to produce examples of these linguistic terms and elements based on the prompts, instructions and model examples provided in the rubric of each task/exercise.

In this examination session, four tasks were set as mentioned above. Slightly less than half the number of candidates who sat for the examination opted to answer Question 1, which was therefore the preferred option. Overall, the performance of candidates who answered this question was relatively weaker than those candidates who answered either Question 2 (the essay), or Question 3 (analysis of article).

Many candidates encountered great difficulties in tasks A and B. Their performance was extremely poor in these two tasks. In Task A, most candidates did poorly as they did not write a correct sentence using the word provided according to the word class function supplied in brackets. It was evident that candidates either ignored the instruction in brackets as to how to use the word in a sentence, or else had no knowledge of the fact that the same word may have different functions in a sentence. Some candidates even changed the word given by adding a suffix, as in love (adjective) being turned to lovely. Words such as weak (noun), all (pronoun), where (conjunction), and weather (verb) caused great difficulties for candidates.

In Task B, again, many candidates performed poorly, mainly because they failed to identify the correct type of sentence, whether simple, compound, or complex. There were many who failed to notice the effect of ellipsis in sentences ii, and viii (both compound sentences). Additionally, many candidates seemed to mistake length of sentence (as in iii and vii) with complex sentence type. In sentence v, candidates wrongly interpreted the word before as a subordinating conjunction introducing a subordinate clause, when in effect it functioned as a preposition of time for the noun phrase that followed. Even when some candidates managed to identify the correct type of sentence, they did not provide a correct or accurate explanation for their decision. In fact, their responses evidenced a clear lack of knowledge of what constitutes a main and a subordinate clause, and how two main clauses may be linked by a coordinating conjunction to form a compound sentence.

Candidates performed better in tasks C and especially D. In Task C, a substantial number of candidates managed to provide clear and accurate explanations of the semantic terms given in the exercise, as well as an example that clearly illustrated the term. However, there were also some candidates who either provided incorrect, weak, confusing explanations and / or who did not provide an appropriate, clear example for the term. Another difficulty encountered by candidates was the term hypernymy, which they confused with hyponymy. Thus, their answer was incorrect as they explained the specific term (rather than the general term in relation to the specific one) and provided specific examples of the word/ term.

In Task D, candidates performed well, and many managed to correctly identify the cohesive device that was underlined. Their explanations, regarding the connection or link between the two sentences, were

reasonably clear and accurate. The only difficulty that a few candidates faced was distinguishing between cataphoric and anaphoric reference in relation to the first pair of sentences, where the correct answer was cataphoric reference.

Candidates need to be reminded that they should have a solid knowledge and understanding of all the topics (including terms and concepts) in Area 1 of the syllabus because they form the fundamental features of language as a system and provide the necessary framework for language and literary analysis. The performance of many candidates in this question, this year, shows that many do not possess an adequate understanding of these topics.

*Question 2: ESSAY: Differences between written and spoken question*

In this essay question, candidates were required to discuss, in some detail, the salient characteristics and the main differences between the two modes of communication, that is speech and writing. Since the answer takes the form of an expository essay, candidates were expected to present a clear introduction of the two modes of communication, a development of a number of well-structured, cogent and coherent paragraphs, and some concluding remarks.

Each of the development paragraphs should have focused on the following characteristics and differences:

Status of Speech and Writing, the Concept of Permanence, the Relationship between speaker or writer and audience, Structure and Style, and Mutual influence between the two modes.

Candidates were also expected to use correct terminology associated with the various areas of difference (e.g., primacy of speech; acquisition vs learning; prestige of writing; permanence vs transience; restrictions in time and space; immediate and delayed feedback; phonic vs graphic substance; organized and structured vs spontaneous and unplanned; associative, fragmented vs linear, logical; prosodic features vs punctuation/other graphological devices, etc.).

Candidates could have also referred to how technological innovations, advancements and new forms of communication (text messaging, social media, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, emails, Video links, group forums and chats, AI, etc.) are blurring the differences between these two modes of communication. Indeed, reference to this issue could have been a very good conclusion to candidates' essay, although reference to these new developments could have also been included within any one of the development paragraphs.

Approximately a fifth of the candidates opted to answer Question 2. Therefore, this question was the third preferred choice for candidates. Interestingly, candidates who answered this question performed much better than those who answered either question 1 (four tasks) or question 3 (analysis of newspaper article).

There were also fewer candidates who answered Question 2 who obtained either a mediocre or poor result, when compared to those who obtained similar results in questions 1 and 3.

Those candidates who performed well, very well, or excelled in this question demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the various aspects of difference, strengths and weaknesses of the two modes of communication and used the correct terminology in their explanation. The essays of these candidates showed that they were knowledgeable about the topic, and that they had a very good understanding of most of the issues and features related to the topic.

On the other hand, the responses of candidates who provided a mediocre or poor performance were characterised by:

- i. Weak, inaccurate, limited, vague knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and differences, strengths and weaknesses of the two modes of communication;
- ii. Lack of knowledge of specific terms and concepts relevant to the topic;
- iii. Irrelevant material, such as drifting into other topics such as variation in language, especially accents, dialects and idiolects; register and jargon;
- iv. Erratic organisation, paragraphing, structure of essay, with no indication of topic sentences to introduce development paragraphs and to present a cogent, coherent explanation/ description within a paragraph;
- v. Very poor writing skills, especially in syntax, punctuation and appropriate lexical choice;
- vi. Almost illegible handwriting and messy presentation (including frequent starred/asterisked additions/corrections, and crossed out sentences/paragraphs) which made reading the specific essay a very challenging, if not impossible, ordeal.

### *Question 3: ANALYSIS of Tabloid Newspaper*

This kind of essay requires candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding of the specific linguistic/stylistic features that characterise a specific type of non-literary written text. In this examination session, a newspaper article from *The Mirror*, a tabloid newspaper, was set. The *content* of the article dealt with 'verbal abuse, threats, and assault' suffered by shop workers as a result of an increase in 'shoplifting' offences. The rubric of the question directed the candidates to read the text carefully and to notice, identify, describe, and comment about features of the text such as *graphology, headlines, vocabulary, grammar, tone and structure*.

This question was the second preferred option for candidates. In fact, more than a quarter of candidates opted for this question. The performance of the candidates who answered this question was less positive than those who answered question 2, the essay, and rather similar or only slightly better than those who opted for question 1, the tasks. In fact, 48.65 % of those who answered this question achieved a result which ranged from good to very good to excellent (2.09%).

The candidates who performed well in this question demonstrated a very good knowledge of the linguistic/stylistic features of non-literary written texts, as well as the skills and the terminology required to comment about these features. Their textual analysis was clear in expression, accurate in identification and description of features, and informed by a sound knowledge and understanding of the way language and graphology are used in such texts. The essays of these candidates were lucidly and coherently presented; a number of candidates even used subheadings as a way of structuring/signposting/sequencing their commentary. They also engaged fully with the text and referred to specific elements, words, and phrases within the text to support their analysis and commentary.

On the other hand, there were around half of those who answered this question who provided mediocre or poor answers. The main weaknesses of these essays were due to:

- i. Lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the linguistic/stylistic features of such texts, as well as the skills required for textual analysis;

- ii. Not knowing the correct terminology required when identifying and commenting about the most evident features of the text, especially about graphology and headlines;
- iii. Lack of engagement with text in terms of identifying aspects of vocabulary worthy of comment (such as journalese, lexical field of crime and violence, emotive vocabulary, statistical data figures); grammatical aspects (an area which candidates fail to understand, and which they confuse with either vocabulary or tone), such as sentence type, paragraph length, use of direct speech; level of formality in text, tone, and discourse structure of article.
- iv. Presenting irrelevant, vague, and impressionistic statements about the newspaper article, its type (a few even stated that it was a broadsheet article) and its features, as well as paraphrasing the content rather than analysing the specific features of the text.
- v. Failure to support statements with clear examples taken from text.
- vi. Poor, incorrect, at times incoherent expression and use of language.

It is important to emphasise that this type of question requires candidates to have a solid understanding of the language system (in terms of the topics, concepts and terms described in Area 1 of syllabus, language frameworks), to read the text carefully in order to notice and identify the various features that characterise this type of text. Pages 186 – 189 of the prescribed textbook (English Language AS & A2 by Alan Gardiner) provide a model of how to analyse a non-literary written text.

#### *Concluding Comments on Linguistics Performance:*

In general, candidates' performance in this examination session showed that was a slight dip in results achieved, though there were a few more who achieved excellent or very good results. However, this year there were considerably more candidates who achieved results ranging from the mediocre to the poor. It is important to remind all candidates that they should prepare themselves for this section of the exam by studying *all areas and topics of the syllabus*. Unfortunately, it appears that some candidates are only focusing on a few topics in the hope that they will feature in the examination paper, and are not familiar enough with the concepts, terms and elements of linguistic study. Still, this does not explain why some candidates perform so poorly in non-literary text analysis when it has become obvious that either a newspaper article, or an advertisement will probably feature as one of the three questions. It is evident that candidates are NOT well prepared for this kind of textual analysis. It is also very important to emphasise the importance of clear, coherent, accurate and idiomatic language in answering essay type questions as in question 2 and 3 this year.

### **C. CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This year's session reveals a continuation of many of the challenges that have characterised recent sittings of the AM English examination. While there are some indications of marginal improvement in certain areas – such as a slightly higher proportion of candidates achieving Grade C or better when compared to last year, and a notable drop in the number of outright failures – the general performance remains underwhelming, and many of the concerns raised in previous reports remain relevant, if not more urgent.

One persistent concern is the candidates' overall ability to produce English of an appropriate standard for this level of study. This is evident across all written components, with examiners repeatedly drawing attention to the frequent use of awkward syntax, basic spelling and grammatical errors, and a lack of coherence or fluency in argumentation. These issues continue to hinder otherwise competent content

knowledge, and in many cases result in the inability to translate ideas into structured, persuasive responses.

In terms of critical ability, many candidates continue to struggle with moving beyond basic identification toward sustained, evaluative engagement with texts and questions. This is particularly apparent in the set texts (Paper 1 and 2), where rote-learned responses frequently dominate, often bearing little relevance to the specific demands of the question. The issue of memorisation rather than interpretation was particularly prominent in the treatment of poetry and prose texts, with candidates displaying minimal sensitivity to authorial voice, tone, or textual nuance. In multiple cases, as in previous years, essays resorted to paraphrase or generalisation rather than developed literary argument.

Paper 1 remains a cause for concern, with performance in Section B (Set Poetry) and Section C (Poetry Criticism) once again highlighting a serious lack of personal engagement, analytical depth, and linguistic clarity. Similarly, performance in the unseen Prose Criticism section of Paper 2 demonstrated that, while candidates may have grasped the surface features of a text, they frequently failed to construct arguments or to identify and interpret key literary strategies. It is disappointing to note, for instance, that in Poetry Criticism, very few candidates addressed the central themes of the poem in any sustained manner, while in the Set Texts, the prevalence of generic or biographical approaches often obscured textual analysis altogether.

The continued reliance on narrative retelling, particularly in the essays on set novels and plays, suggests a widespread difficulty in transitioning from comprehension to interpretation. While some improvement in focused responses was noted in structured essay titles (e.g., in the more specific Atwood or McEwan prompts), this improvement was far from universal and cannot mitigate the general weakness in candidates' ability to frame coherent, argument-led essays.

That said, there were still areas of strength. The Language Essay (Paper 3, Section A) continues to be the best-performing written component, with a notable reduction in failing scripts and a wider range of creative and articulate submissions. It is also encouraging to note that the oral component remains strong, with very few failures, though even here weaknesses in fluency, accuracy, and lexical range persist. Nonetheless, the oral remains a space in which many candidates are able to express themselves more confidently.

Summary writing (Paper 3, Section B) and Linguistics (Section C) remain among the most problematic areas. In the case of the former, candidates again struggled with cohesion, focus, and precision, often failing to distinguish their own opinions from those of the source text. In the latter, many candidates showed insufficient understanding of basic linguistic concepts and terminology, particularly when attempting applied tasks. This is especially disappointing given the clear and predictable nature of the Linguistics syllabus and its examination components.

To address the persistent challenges highlighted in recent assessment sessions, it is recommended to investigate the underlying reasons why many candidates struggle to achieve average performance and why certain exam components consistently yield high failure rates. Improving candidate preparation is essential, which may involve revisiting how literature is taught, ensuring a more effective balance between interpretation and reproduction, and placing greater emphasis on formal language development.

## Examiners' Report (2025): AM ENGLISH

The AM English exam remains a critical benchmark in the academic and professional trajectory of many candidates, and the skills it tests – critical thought, expressive clarity, and engagement with language and by extension thought – are central to a much wider set of social and educational aims. It is in this spirit that this report reiterates the need for concerted attention to the areas of weakness outlined, and for a re-commitment to the kinds of teaching and preparation that can enable candidates not only to pass, but to thrive.

Chairperson  
Examination Panel 2025