

## **GCSE (9-1)**

*Examiners' report*

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**J351**

For first teaching in 2015

## **J351/02 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

For information on the English Language Spoken Language Endorsement process, please refer to: <https://www.ocr.org.uk/administration/stage-3-assessment/general-qualifications/orals-practicals-performances/gcse-9-1-english-language-spoken-language-endorsement/>

## Paper 2 series overview

This is the third June Session of this paper in the current Series, in addition to the two November Sessions in 2017 and 2018. It reflected that both teachers and their students are increasingly familiar with the layout and set up of the Paper, and similarly with Paper J351/01, its companion component.

The main difference between the two components is that J351/01 assesses candidates' responses to non-fiction texts whereas J351/02 assesses their responses to literary texts. Each of the components follows an almost identical structure (the difference is the amount of assessment given to AO1) and each of the four Assessment Objectives are tested in each paper. There is no assessment of AO1/2 (the comparative question) in this paper, 02.

To do well in this component candidates must be able to read unseen literary texts with confidence and understanding. They should be able to select relevant details from each of the texts and identify and explain points of language and structure. They must also be able to identify similarities and differences between the texts and evaluate their impact on the reader.

There was more evidence this year that candidates had managed to read to the end of both passages, perhaps an advantage of their relatively shorter length.

They should be practised and confident in producing well shaped, thoughtful and accurate personal writing.

Centres have clearly paid careful attention to previous versions of this document. Generally speaking, candidates are using more successful approaches to respond to each question in turn. Responses generally show a clearer understanding of the separate demands of each successive task. The match between the space available in the answer booklet and the candidate's response is about right. Often candidates who go on to an additional answer booklet have little more to offer which is rewardable.

Overall, candidates might still improve their performance on the paper by developing their performance on Questions 2 & 3, those that test language and structure, especially the latter. This is tested in Q3 of Paper One. There is also some evidence that candidates' writing might be enhanced through a more carefully judicious choice of topic. These points are greatly expanded and exemplified below.

Overall the paper elicited some interesting and perceptive responses. The passages had been understood (although passage two often less well than passage one) and there was the usual significant evidence that candidates had been carefully prepared for the requirements of the paper. Candidates of all abilities were afforded and mostly took a variety of opportunities to show their skills and knowledge in English. Conversely there were few who were unable or unwilling to complete the paper or for whom the reading passages were beyond comprehension.

## Section A overview

Almost all candidates scored full marks on Q1: those who did not did not make 1b a clearly inferential response, for example by going from the first person to the third. Questions 2 & 3 might still do more on structural points, especially Q3 on passage two which was the less well understood. Question 4 was well answered with more candidates giving confident fully interwoven comparisons.

Key points on reading:-

- do not simply describe or paraphrase
- use relevant subject terminology to develop the response: if it doesn't do that, don't use it
- make sure you have commented on both language and structure, which will be much more than sentence structure
- do not make unreferenced statements about punctuation
- be as exact and precise as you can

### Question 1 (a)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* by Alan Sillitoe.

1 Look again at lines 1–4.

(a) Identify **two** phrases **from these lines** that show the narrator feels positive about long distance running.

.....  
..... [2]

Almost all candidate achieved a full two marks here. The most popular choices were 'long distance running lark is the best of all' and 'makes me think so good'. Few candidates strayed from the set lines. The intention is that this is a very straightforward task which is designed to get all candidates off to a confident and successful start and this is what it achieved. Candidates should remember that they will not be credited for 'best guess' style overlong quotations. What is direct, pithy and concise is what is wanted.

### Question 1 (b)

(b) Explain **two** positive effects which long distance running has on him.

.....  
..... [2]

Again, most candidates got two marks but there was a more significant number who did not do so. Whereas 1a is straightforward location, this requires some slight inference. It was perfectly acceptable to re-cycle the points copied in 1a and say 'it makes him think so well he learns better' (or words to that effect) or 'he can go five miles better than anyone else in the Borstal' but not simply lift again from the text. Some candidates did stray outside the set lines and moved further down the passage. Such responses do not gain credit. There has to be a simple explanatory comment or inference of some kind here. Over general inferences, e.g. 'he gets healthier' were not rewarded because they became speculative.

#### Exemplar 1

(a) Identify **two** phrases from these lines that show the narrator feels positive about long distance running.

*'the best of all'*.....  
*'makes me think so good'*..... [2]

(b) Explain **two** positive effects which long distance running has on him.

*He is able to think and learn things well. It is also making him.....*  
*one of the best runners in the Borstal.....* [2]

A very pithy and exact response to Q1 a & b



of his ability to tolerate the low temperatures in a way that his fellow detainees might not by complaining about it 'to their mams' which he is man enough not to do. It reflects the ways in which the running has given him enhanced physical confidence and develops the previous images of cold. So, in itself it is a structural point, too.

This means that the crucial pivot of the sentence is 'I don't' separated by commas on each side and emphasising the transition from pain to pleasure, cold to warmth, unreality to reality etc. etc. The contrasts that follow are therefore all available as points about structure as well, potentially, as about language. As opposed to the originally and freshly minted compound 'frost pain suffering', which is the strongest intensification of the former, we get images of the return of civilisation, warmth and comfort. 'Wheatfield' suggests fecundity, growth and man and nature in harmony as Smith has become. 'Bus stop' a sense of purpose and direction both of which are hyperbolised (as many candidates stated) by the 'potbellied stove' and finally 'dog with a tin tail'. Few candidates understood 'tin tail' in detail (like most examiners) but its inference is obvious: the wagging is so intense it appears to have stopped and become subsumed into a single rigid image.

## Exemplar 2

Alan Sillitoe undermines the pleasure felt by Smith by presenting the ~~feelings~~ negative feelings of the running. Smith is presented as feeling 'frozen stiff at first' suggesting some rigidity and an inability to move, enhanced by the repetition of the 'f' sounds. This inability is taken further by the polysyndetic tricolon: 'can't feel my hands or feet or flesh at all' where the negation directly expresses the rigidity and the repetition of 'or' enhances this. The simile 'like I'm a ghost' depersonalises Smith and separates his intentions from his body.

However Smith counters this. He does not see the 'frost-pain' as 'suffering'. The compound noun created highlights the lack of pleasure felt by 'some people' and comparing it to 'suffering' implies that the running is seen as torture to them, but Smith does not directly deny this feeling, 'I don't'. This implies that he doesn't feel the pain that others see in the run.

Structurally the paragraph focus shifts from the general attitude of pain towards running at the beginning of the paragraph to Smith's own feelings towards the end of the paragraph. This <sup>change</sup> is reflected by his getting to 'the main road' and 'turning on to the wheatfield ~~part~~ footpath'. He personally feels 'as hot as a pottellied stove and as happy as a dog with by the end of the run contrasting both parts of 'frost-pain'. For ~~see~~ These similes compare him to both a source of heat and joy implying that he enjoys and welcomes the run. [6]

An excellent response to Question 2 which balances points on language and structure.

## Exemplar 3

Sillitoe first uses structural techniques to demonstrate his initial discomfort. He introduces the paragraph with a short direct address "mind you" to involve the reader and ~~directly contrast~~ ~~the~~ create a shift in tone.

He also ~~just~~ uses juxtaposition to contrast his actual passion for the park, contrasting what "some people" would say with his own opinion, saying "I don't". These opposing pronouns draw out his real feelings and personal sentiment.

Lastly he uses a list-like structure to count off the milestones on his journey: <sup>when he says,</sup> "I got to the main road turning on to the wheatfield footpath by the bus stop". This descriptive journey also has a sense of familiarity because of it, suggesting he has a good personal connection with the park, and the path that it brings.

He also uses language to demonstrate his fondness for the park. He uses simple and warm powerful language to do so; "I'm going to feel as hot as a potbellied stove" says. The language with connotations with the fire express a deeper love, passion and desire in the sun.

He ~~could~~ expresses his deep park with <sup>cold</sup> language, saying he feels "frozen stiff at first", suggesting that <sup>a</sup> the park which [6]  
(continued on extra)

holds him back and prevents him from even functioning.

Another route to full marks on Question 2.

## Exemplar 4

Firstly, in 'The loneliness of the long distance runner' by Alan Sillitoe, the writer uses ~~Basic~~ <sup>Concise</sup> different language techniques to describe his pain. He says 'like a ghost'. Sillitoe uses a simile to effectively convey his pain. The comparison to a ghost implies he felt death as ghosts have connections with after life. This tells the reader that he is feeling close to death or is implying the pain is like dying.

Secondly, Sillitoe shows a determined attitude when he says: 'Some people would call this frost-pain suffering, if they write about to their mums in a letter, I don't, because I know' - half an hour in a pocket of a warm. Sillitoe uses a long sentence to describe the stages to his pain. He also uses commas to break up the sentence. Structurally this creates a pause to the reader when he says 'I don't'. This shows that he is different to other people and ~~he~~ will push through the pain because he knows it will be over soon.

A 3-mark response (Level 3) note the thinner development of ideas and examples compared with the previous 2.

## Question 3

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *The Ingenious Edgar Jones* by Elizabeth Garner.

3 Look again at lines 10–25.

Explore how the writer uses language and structure to present the different feelings William Jones has about where he lives and where he works.

Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

Again, strong responses could be structured and planned with astute observation of the wording of the task. 'Different feelings' about 'where he lives, and works' gives a potentially clear structure in which to develop a comprehensive response.

One of the keys to a strong response here was to show a full understanding of the very rich extended metaphor at the heart of the set lines. The starting point is in the second sentence of the third paragraph: 'it was sometimes thus.....'. This starts the knitting together of the literal strand about getting lost in Jericho's twisted roads 'which turned in on each other' and the fourth sentence, flagged as a significant contrast by the opening 'But'. The 'shadowed corners' and 'dark alley' serve to extend the geographical picture of this part of Oxford but subsume it in the sense of personal insecurity and confusion. Strong candidates saw that this rises to a climax in the final segment of the sentence 'sitting in a room that seemed... to be his home, but was not.' Here the final three words which start with an echo of the initial 'but' strongly emphasise the reality of the situation at home. We have come in from the streets and Jones's confusion and disenfranchisement from an initially apparent normality are complete. Remember that the task is about his feelings which are clearly and unambiguously positive at work but mixed and confused at home.

Plainly there is much to say here about sentence structure and again too many candidates contented themselves by talking about the alleged length of the sentences. More detailed responses saw that the sentence structures mimic the imminence and then the actuality of 'being lost' with the multi-clausal final sentence reaching an unwelcome but inevitable conclusion.

Many candidates talk about 'asyndeton' and 'polysyndeton' believing they are using 'relevant subject terminology'. Too many rarely use them correctly or in any way which develops their response and (like many other terms) remain unproductive add-ons to their commentary. There were very few here, however, who fully saw that the effect of the sentence is dependent not just on understanding the way the polysyndeton works but the effects of the contrasting 'ands' and 'buts'.

More than a few candidates wrongly equated 'domestic' with domestic violence.

The preceding paragraph prompted a good deal of hard work on 'invisible boundary' and 'difference between his worlds'. There are structure points to be gained here not only in terms of the paragraph itself but also in terms of the contrasts and comparisons with the closing paragraph. He 'loved the turning' because when he approached the college he was 'knew exactly who he was'. Not the well-intentioned but confused soul at home but, remarkably, the uniformed official who finds a secure identity in 'watching over great minds....'. No wonder, as candidates who got to the end of the passage remarked, that given all his circumstances, 'no one could shift him from it'.

The key word in the final paragraph is the opening one, yet another conjunction, 'whereas' which marks the string of contrasts we are given. Candidates making points about the ways in which architecture and geography reflected the changes in Jones's feelings as he made his way to his reassuring work self were rewarded. Some more fanciful interpretations suggested that in view of the 'spires' and the 'heavens' he took on some form of deification were less successful.

All in all, the passage and task worked well although it was undoubtedly more challenging than the first passage. If candidates missed the central metaphor, or simply took what is said literally, they were denying themselves access to marks in the upper levels, almost certainly. The task is not about what Jones does or even is; it is about his thoughts and feelings about those things.

### Exemplar 5

3) Garner describes Jones as feeling that his home is predominantly a place where he feels loved and connected to his family. Jones feels that when he is in Jericho, he is a 'loving husband', suggesting that this feeling is specific to when he is near home and changes or fades when he goes to work. Garner describes the conversation between Jones and his wife as being able to 'ebb and flow between them'. This metaphor compares the conversations to a body of water, portraying the relationship Jones has with his wife positively by suggesting it is natural and effortless, and 'full of affection'. The word 'full' suggests that the feelings Jones has for his wife when he is at home are extremely positive as there is physically no more room for affection. Garner describes their unborn child as 'blossoming'. This verb compares the baby's growth to a flourishing plant or flower, also showing Jones' life at home to be happy and family-oriented. This shows that most of the time, Jones sees Jericho and his home as being the place of his family, and being there causes him to focus on them.

Garner also describes Jericho in a more negative tone, revealing Jones' more negative feelings about the place where he lives. She describes how the 'roads of

Jericho twisted in upon themselves'. This metaphor paints Jericho in a more sinister light, by describing it as being like a maze or a trap. This greatly contrasts to the description of Jericho as a 'quiet domestic world' earlier in the extract. The writer uses the twisting streets as a metaphor for Jones' relationship with his wife, as he feels that their are 'shadowed corners in their speech', that could lead to him feeling 'that he had taken a wrong turning down a dark alley'. The beginning of the sentence is very abrupt, especially as it starts with the connective 'but'. This abrupt structure creates a strong contrast between the positives and negatives of his relationship with his wife. The metaphor of 'shadowed corners' in speech juxtaposes with the description of their speech as 'full of affection', showing that there is a darker side to their relationship. 'shadowed', 'corners' and 'a dark alley' all have connotations of darkness and secrecy, revealing that there is a darker side to both the streets of Jericho and Jones' family life, showing that his feelings towards his home and Jericho are not as straightforward as they first appeared. This darkness can make Jones feel that his home looks like his home in 'outwards appearance' but is not actually his home. This reveals that Jones feels that the place where he lives is not always a place of love and family, but instead can be a place of confusion and dark secrets that makes him feel 'lost' at times.

Garner describes Jones as having very different feelings about the place where he works compared to the place where he lives. She describes the university streets as being able to change the way that Jones sees himself. Garner describes the university buildings as 'broad' and 'shoulder to shoulder'. This contrasts the the description of Jericho as having roads that 'twisted', already revealing how differently Jones feels about where he works. It suggests that Jones' life at work is much more straightforward than his life at home, and the buildings and roads are a metaphor that

reflect this. Garner describes the buildings as having 'domes, spires and battlements pointing magnificently towards the heavens'. The nouns 'domes', 'spires' and 'battlements' compare the university to a castle. This could be a metaphor for how Jones feels that the university is a place of safety for him as it gives him an escape from the other aspects of his life by giving him a straightforward purpose, as a castle is often very secure and heavily fortified. The adjective 'magnificently' and mention of the 'heavens' further show how positively Jones feels about the place that he works. Garner describes Jones as loving the place that he works because when he is there, he 'knew exactly who he was', the 'warden of the nights'. This shows how differently Jones feels in Jericho compared to at the university, as at home he is afraid of 'shadowed corners' and 'dark alleys', contrasting greatly to at work where he feels that he defends others from the 'nights'. Jones is grateful for having that 'place and function', instead of the confusing feeling of being 'lost' 'down a dark alley' that he feels at home. Garner uses this description to present how Jones feels that the place where he works is much more simple and secure than the place where he lives.

An excellent answer to Question 3, which received full marks.

## Exemplar 6

The writer uses language and structure to present the different feelings William Jones has about where he lives and where he works. In lines 10 the writer says that "He always loved the turning from the lanes of Jernho out on to St Giles." William Jones always loved to go out on long walks and go to his favourite places. "Every time he trod this path he would reflect how the change in the streets echoed the differences between his worlds." The writer shows here that William Jones likes experimenting different tones and that he was discovering different things out and about.

"But there were times where there were shadowed corners in their speech, when a thing might not mean to Eleanor but it means to him, and he would

that he had taken a wrong turning down a dark alley, and was sitting in a room that seemed in outward appearance to be his home, but was not." In this quote the writer is expressing how down the William Jones feels and to him he feels like he taken the wrong footpath down a very dark alley and hes all alone with nobody around him to help him.

"And here William knew exactly who he was: he was porter Jones, Warden of the nights, the man who watched over great minds as they slumbered." Here the writer is showing the William Jones finally worked out who he was and what he does.

A far weaker response to Question 3. Very long lifts from the text and very brief comments.

## Question 4

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and **Text 2**, *The Ingenious Edgar Jones*.

- 4 'In these texts being on your own is described as a pleasant and worthwhile experience.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the characters' different experiences of being on their own
- explain how far their experiences are pleasant or worthwhile
- compare the ways the writers present characters' experiences of being on their own.

Support your response with quotations from **both** texts.

[18]

One of the pleasing features of this specification is that this was the new addition to the range of skills and competencies that candidates needed to learn and practice. The evidence has been, from the first sitting, that teachers have worked hard and successfully to give candidates a thorough grounding in how to approach the task which combines two Assessment Objectives and carries the most marks. It is one of features that is most commented on in terms of its accessibility and attractiveness.

This task was one of the most successful of its kind, perhaps because of the powerful understanding of the first passage that almost all candidates brought with them and their powerful response to 'being alone' which was given later exposition in a range of splendid writing.

There were two palpable features of less successful writing on this topic.

One was where candidates had not fully understood the second passage, having misread or simply misunderstood what was going on. This led to very lopsided answers in which attempted links and comparisons were invalidated and/or undeveloped with relevance. The other was where (frankly a very few candidates) gave their personal views and opinions on being alone rather than construct a relevant commentary based on task led evaluation of the written material in front of them.

Almost all candidates saw that both characters enjoyed solitude: Smith is transported into his own world where 'he is like a ghost who wouldn't know the earth was under him' and Jones is moved 'look up to the stars and the heavens' in a rapture ensuing from his departure from home.

Smith endures the 'frost pain suffering' in the sure and certain anticipation of warmth and satisfaction because of the intense feelings of freedom and liberation he feels. Here he knows who he is, where he is going and likes the experience. All the more ironically as he is an inmate. Jones, too, has a clear sense of direction as he takes his evening walk to the College after the 'shadows and dark alleys' he has endured at home. As he approaches his place of work, he, like Smith, has a clear sense of place and purpose, the epitome of 'worthwhile'.

But whereas Smith's self-discovery and self-confidence emanate from an essentially private sense of himself, for Jones security and confidence stem from the assumption of a uniform and a public self which are undeniable and unchallengeable. Perhaps what repels Smith most about Borstal life (as opposed to Bristol life as some candidates had it).

As his run progresses Smith is engaged by nature: the wheat field and the big bellied oak tree. At its conclusion his feelings are essentially physical, hence the importance of the final simile. For Jones it is not only nature ('velvet dark of the sky') but also man-made beauty 'domes and spires' that impress him in the context of his man-made status and position.

Smith's experience is therefore both pleasant and worthwhile but for Jones it is at least as worthwhile and possibly more pleasant although, of course, candidates could and did argue the case in both or either ways.

As always, the stronger responses stemmed from candidates who set off with more than an 'I agree completely' stance although many who did changed their minds in the course of constructing their answer: and nothing is wrong with that.

Successful candidates focus throughout on the task and the way it has been worded. They let their discussion drive the comparisons; they eschew outside information and personal opinion; and make regular and well balanced, well supported comparisons.

## Exemplar 7

4. Both extracts show that being on your own can be a pleasant experience but I believe that Text 1 portrays this more vividly than Text 2. In Text 1 being on your own is shown to give you freedom and space to think, whereas in Text 2 being on your own seems to just increase the character's restrictions.

In Text 1 being on your own is portrayed as a freeing and beautiful experience. The narrator likens it to a 'dream', showing the extent of his freedom and also the ease in which he runs while alone. This is particularly significant due to his prison life and the narrator says there was no 'soul to make [him] feel bad tempered' and nobody to persuade him to 'break and enter' a shop. This shows he is able to escape his background and past crimes through being on his own. At the beginning of the extract, the narrator uses a low socialect through phrases such as 'think so good' and 'what with' but as the text continues, and the narrator phases out of this and uses more complex structures and language such as similes showing that running helps him to escape his life.

Similarly in Text 2 William Jones feels that by being on his own he can go back to his familiar work so as to avoid the complicated situation at his home. He use of repeated expressions of the time in the first paragraph in 'six o'clock...quarter-past six...half-past six' shows the lack of freedom in his life and in the home. This is emphasised by his actions being to the 'beat of the bell' showing a sense of helplessness as he is moving to

the rhythm of an inanimate object. By contrast the Jericho streets 'twisted in upon themselves' and a 'a man' would get easily lost, implying that Jones does not because he knows the streets. This contrasts to the 'wrong turn' he takes at home into the 'shadowy corner showing he is escaping the situation at home.

Despite this, in Text 2 there still seems to be a lack of freedom in Jones's life even though he is alone whereas in Text 1 there is no sign of this. In Text 2 the setting in the night utilises pathetic fallacy to give the scene tension and foreboding whereas in Text 1 the scene is set in the early morning perhaps signifying hope. In Text 2 the moon is just a 'stray feather stick to the velvet dark of the sky' showing its imperfection and also the way it does not fit in. The adjective 'stray' is often associated with things that are unwanted or wild which don't belong, whereas the contrasting description of the sky as 'velvet' shows the richness of the sky and its more human, material beauty and therefore its difference from the moon. The moon's portrayal as something which is not wanted is particularly powerful because normally a full moon is seen to be beautiful. In Text 1 however, things that are often seen as ugly are turned into things of beauty. The phrase of 'dead before coming alive' directly contrasts real life through the narrators dream showing that he can see things in a good light. The narrator's overcoming of his physical pains also shows that he is able to escape his life by being alone which grants him freedom.

Overall, both texts convincingly show that being alone is a good thing but in Text 2, being alone does not seem to solve Jones's problems. He seems to want to escape family life and be alone, despite his affectionate relationship with his wife and go from one world of order to another whilst not really improving his situation. By contrast, Text 1 clearly shows the narrator being able to transcend his boundaries, physical and

An excellent response to Question 4, which received full marks for both AO3 and AO4.

### Exemplar 8

And in text 2<sup>o</sup> being on your own is also described as pleasant and worthwhile experience because some people tend to not like being on their own because it brings too many memories back to them whereas some people find being on their own helps them to understand and realise who they are and what they have actually become!

being on your own is shown as a good thing because Alan Sillitoe writes about how going for a run first thing in the morning can help because it gets rid of all the bad thoughts that are bothering you and it helps to de-stress you.

A weak response to Question 4, which makes very few links between the texts

## Section B overview

The standard of most (but not all of) the writing remains higher than that of the reading. Candidates obviously take pleasure in writing personal fiction in the complete privacy of the examination hall in which their imaginations can run freely, if not run riot.

The best work has been carefully planned and builds to a clear and effective conclusion. It deploys a wide range of sensitively and aptly chosen vocabulary and sentence structures. It often operates on more than one level, for example the candidate who enjoyed the Rhianna concert but explored the effects of that in terms of her medical condition.

### Question 5

#### 5 *Alone.*

Use this as the title for a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore your characters' thoughts and feelings about being alone.

[40]\*

This was by far the most popular title with candidates seizing the opportunity to write about the trials and/or the enjoyment of being or wanting to be alone across a wide variety of different contexts. Often these contexts were familiar such as home or school but other were more imaginative such as different worlds or different circumstances. Overall the standard was impressive with some candidates attaining a professional standard with much sophistication given the time constraints and intimidation of such an important examination.

For those candidates who found it all more of a struggle it would have been useful to write less (sometimes much less) and to concentrate much more on accuracy and apt expression.

As in previous sessions (both June and November) far too many candidates depress what it is possible to reward them because they fail to choose one tense and/or one person to write in and write consistently in it.

The task, 'Alone' gave rise to many outpourings of angst and teenage isolation and insecurity and it was sometimes difficult for examiners to distinguish between strongly imaginative fiction and what might have been a 'cry for help'.

Much credit therefore to candidates who added a reassuring note to confirm to examiners that what they had produced was, indeed, fiction.

Strong candidates have confidence in then validity and worthiness of their own personal experience, be it real or imagined. Weaker candidates feel the need to fall back on derivative copies of extravagant situations way beyond anything they could have been exposed to themselves.

There were an amazing number of candidates who had homes and/or schools in close proximity to thick impenetrable forests.

## Exemplar 9

Oscar heard a cry from behind the wall of flowers. He rushed to push the long stalks aside to see what had been found. ~~Disappointed~~ His friend burst through the ~~set~~ flowers in front of him giddy with pleasure: "Look! I found it!"

He had indeed found the little trinket belonging to their Scout Master, - the treasure on this hunt. A wave of relief spread through him as he revelled in the same winning delight as his team-mate. They had been searching for what had seemed like days, although Oscar wasn't complaining. They had been taken to Portugal on the most exotic camping trip of a lifetime, and ~~was~~, having been tasked to find the hidden treasure, they had all split up into the glorious fields of lavender.

The opening and closure of an excellent Question 5 essay

## Exemplar 10

It was a wonderful sunny August day in 2014. I was spending the day with my dad and his partner and kids and we ~~es~~ decided to go out the the beach with my dad's mum and dad! I thought "Oh yeah its going to be an amazing

day to begin with it was,  
we decided to get ready to  
leave it was gone 10:30

A month later, my mum got a  
call saying that she had to get  
up to the hospital asap. so she  
went I went as well everybody  
was stood around him as we  
watched him and comforted  
him as he took his last breathe  
I was soo sad I was distraict

I wanted to be strong but I couldn't  
I felt so alone now he had gone  
and left me! I dont know how  
to cope with it all

I felt so alone !!

The opening and closing sections of a much weaker response to Question 5. There is very little if any connection.

## Question 6

- 6 Describe a time when you found yourself in a crowd or surrounded by people.

You could write about:

- things that made the biggest impression on you
- how the experience affected your thoughts and feelings
- the way you feel about that experience now.

[40]\*

Clearly indicate which question you have chosen to answer.

Many candidates wrote about the agoraphobia experienced at, for example, music festivals or the claustrophobia induced in examination rooms or the London Underground at rush hour. There accounts were often vividly descriptive and communicated the sense of fear, panic or, indeed euphoria that being part of a crowd can produce. More often than not the accounts were pejorative with colourful accounts of booming music and swaying crowds and the very personal effects they induce. There were also numbers of positive accounts of sporting contests of all kinds, mainly football and rugby matches which managed to convey the first- hand experience of being present at them.

Almost all candidates had been very well prepared for this task: candidates enjoyed writing their responses and examiners really enjoyed reading them.

### Exemplar 11

6) A river of people flowed past me, with what felt like thousands of them rushing past me in every direction. I could see a sea of strangers, young and old and tall and short and women and men, each seemingly in more of a hurry than a last, some even running along the crowded pavement. Each and every one of them seemed so focused, so intent on their goal, like a dog following a scent. Yet what I could see was nothing compared to what I could hear. A hundred different sounds, the honking of horns and shouting voices, the hurried footsteps against the paving stones and the music leaking from the store fronts. I stood to the side, afraid of getting swept along by the current of people, and noticed how even the sky seemed crowded, full of heavy grey clouds about to burst at any minute.

But I felt completely alone.

The opening section of a response to Question 6 that just gets to Level 6.

Exemplar 12

From afar the situation looked chaotic: A flock of sheep squabbling around; almost dancing, unintentionally. But in the middle of the chaos was me, <sup>my</sup> the <sup>a minute, milliseconds</sup> one who <sup>speed of</sup> feared ~~any situation that involved people~~ this situation. Fearfully, I dropped to the pavements. "this was the only option" my mind told me. <sup>and</sup> My hands clammy, sweaty, <sup>quietly</sup> <sup>painfully</sup> scraped the rugged pavements; ~~and it was~~ <sup>as</sup> my hands itching from the abrasive materials, slowly, my hands bleeding and bleeding. <sup>Red</sup> It was now when I realised: I was alone.

Continuing through the crowd, <sup>(with vibrant, luminous bleed)</sup> <sup>dripping from my palms</sup> ~~which~~ <sup>it</sup> was like a prison ~~the~~ ~~walk padded~~ ~~with walls padded~~ cell, closing in on me. ~~Leath~~ My ears audibly shattered as the volume of the chants ~~intensely~~ intensified, it was so loud it almost felt so silent, as my ears rung in despair of what is to come for me. ~~As~~ I continued for an escape route, my eyes itched, <sup>because</sup> <sup>as</sup> particles of dust descend, gracefully into ~~at~~ them, distracting them from the rampant scenes that ~~cuddle~~ ~~me~~, huddle me. In fact, ~~truly~~ ~~even~~ ~~as~~ my eyes ~~stung~~ ~~my~~ ~~mouth~~ ~~and~~ I felt dull and in major agony; it was like a dark chocolate coloured pall had descended over me, my mind, my mind confused, ~~of~~ the discombobulated - even my rational ~~thoughts~~ began to disappear...

From now, situation's began to get progressively worse. Although I managed to ~~get~~ try and maintain positive thoughts. Scarcely though, I continued through the crowd, achingly dragging my legs ~~there~~, although my energy was ~~going~~, whilst my knees eroded away producing cuts as deep as the ocean. Suddenly, I peered ~~to~~ upwards to which my surprise I glimpsed at ~~the~~ the illuminating, glistening sky that ~~stabs~~ <sup>creeps</sup> its way past the heads of all the people. In this same moment my nose tingled as the odours <sup>swam</sup> ~~traced~~ through my nasal canal, ~~the~~ the smell of sweat ~~had~~ lingered the filthy air.

Middle section of another example of Question 6 essay, which got Level 4, 15 marks and Level 3 9 marks.

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