

A680 Information and Ideas - Guidance Notes

General Timings

The exam is 2 hours long, but students may benefit from spending 10 minutes reading the Reading texts. Therefore, candidates are recommended to spend 1 hour on the Reading questions and 50 minutes on the Writing task. Timing guidelines for each section will appear on the question paper inner sections from January 2012.

Higher tier - Reading

Texts

One of the reading texts at Higher tier will be a 'media' text, the other a 'non-fiction' text. The order in which the texts are presented will not be significant, and they will not be labelled by genre. No rigid distinction between genres is intended or needed, nor should candidates worry about details of source or author.

What will be important - and should be clear to candidates who read with due attention - is the **purpose** of each text.

Media texts are likely to be those in which the writers set out to promote their own ideas or points of view in order to provoke a response from their readers. In general, they will seek to 'sell' a point of view, to argue a case, to persuade and convince the reader.

Non-fiction texts are likely to be more informative in approach in which writers convey facts, opinions, thoughts and feelings. The purpose of this type of text may be more subtle, perhaps with the intention to entertain the reader or explore various aspects of an idea.

The questions set on the texts will, in the main, focus candidates on showing understanding and appreciation of the key points mentioned above.

Higher - Question 1

Q1 is based on the first text which may be supported by visual cues when such features support the writer's purpose. In the first task candidates will be asked to offer an '**outline**' of the information and/or ideas within the text. Strong answers will show ability to select those key points and **summarise, without 'lifting'** from the text. The mark scheme identifies '**understanding**', '**overview**' and '**focus**' as the principal qualities the examiner will be looking to reward. Use of significant detail will show understanding, as will secure focus on the given task. Repetition of subordinate detail or personal comment on the subject matter has no relevance here, nor should there be comment on the style of the text - that belongs in Q2. The examiner will be looking for a '**range of points**' and the ability to rearrange material to suit the requirements of the question. This is not the same as rewarding quantity (excessive length indicates poor focus), but candidates do need to offer enough material appropriate to purpose to demonstrate the security of their knowledge.

There are a significant number of marks available for this task. Candidates who offer only one or two sentences are unlikely to score highly.

Higher - Questions 2 & 3*

- Question 2 will use the first text again and will build on the work already done for Q1.
- Question 3 will require reference to the second reading text only.
- The same generic mark scheme criteria will be used for marking both of these tasks; however, the marking criteria will be applied with a measure of flexibility in accordance with the varied nature of the texts and tasks.

In these two tasks, candidates will be invited to explore **how** key information, ideas, opinions, feelings or attitudes are presented, and to explain **how** particular features of the text help to define or clarify the writer's purpose. **Thoughtful commentary that consistently links technique to the writer's purpose will score highly.** Comment on the writer's use of language, tone of voice and rhetorical devices, for example, will be relevant here.

One text in the Reading Insert Booklet may include visual cues, such as headings, photographs or graphics. If so, comment on **how such features support the writer's purpose** should be given.

Whereas Q1 asks WHAT is in the piece, Qs 2 & 3 ask HOW it is presented. Both tasks will require careful focus on features of technique. In the mark scheme, the key discriminator that rests between band 4 and band 5 concerns ability to **analyse and explain rather than merely describe** - these are not exercises that will reward candidates for simply saying what they see on the page. Observations that are made about, for example, size of photographs, headings etc. are only of relevance if the candidate can tie observations to the writer's purpose and say **how** this was intended to **shape the reader's response**. Likewise, speculative comments around the source of the article or personal suggestions about the type of person who might like to read the article will not gain credit. Answers that can link ideas firmly to the text will score well. Empty, formulaic comment – “it attracts your attention”, “it draws you in” significantly weakens a response.

Candidates should be reminded that this is emphatically not an exercise in spotting and naming devices such as similes, rhetorical questions and 'rule of three' - although quoting and explaining the effects of examples of such elements, if present, will certainly support a response.

Assertions and general personal comment not linked to the text should be avoided. It will not help if candidates simply describe their own feelings – they will need to indicate that they have some sense of what the writer is doing to cause those feelings. Use of quotation is very helpful in answering both questions, but candidates should not merely 'lift' chunks of text. Examiners are looking for **understanding** of the content and **appreciation** of the technique. The two aspects are likely to be closely connected.

N.B In both questions 2 and 3 it is important that comments made by the candidate relate to the terms and requirements of the **specific question** they are answering. Again, unsupported formulaic comment should be strongly discouraged.

Depending on the content of texts used, there may be some overlap in terms of the requirement for Questions 2 and 3

- - Please note that mark allocations may vary very slightly from session to session, across questions 1 to 3, to ensure that the material in each text is fully utilised.

Foundation tier - Reading

Texts

The Reading Insert Booklet contains two texts, the first for use with Question 1 and the second with Question 2.

The first text will be informative writing, taken for example from a newspaper or website. A picture may be used to illustrate the topic, though candidates will not be asked to comment on the effectiveness of the picture.

The second text will be a media text, with distinctive media-style presentational features, such as headings, photographs and captions. The media text will have a clear purpose: it might, for example, be writing which persuades or convinces a reader, or writing which makes a particular impact. Texts may be drawn from newspapers, magazines, leaflets, websites and other media sources.

Foundation - Question 1

This question comprises three questions requiring short answers (together worth a possible 6 marks) **and** a question requiring a longer answer (worth a possible 14 marks). The questions will usually direct candidates to particular parts of the text, and candidates should be taught to read these directions carefully. Answers to Questions 1(a), (b) and (c) should be written in the boxes provided in the question-and-answer booklet used for the Foundation tier. Candidates should not try to cram too much writing into the boxes; brief responses are required, sometimes only one word.

Question 1(d) asks for candidates to retrieve information from a section of the first text. This is a 'What?' question.

The mark scheme identifies '**understanding**' and '**focus**' as key qualities to be rewarded, **together with an ability to express points in candidates' own words**. It follows that a good answer will include a range of points showing understanding, expressed in own words, in a response that is clearly focused on the question.

By contrast, answers which include a good number of points that have been lifted, and not expressed in own words, **will not** score highly.

Since this is a 'What?' question, candidates are not expected to use quotations or comment on a writer's use of language when answering this question. Lengthy introductions and conclusions are not required, and points should be made once only, as there is no credit for repeated points. Candidates should not give their views on the topic.

Foundation - Question 2

This question relates to the second text and is divided into two.

Question 2(a), weighted at 6 marks, focuses on presentational features of the text. This is a '**How?**' question; it will ask candidates to comment on the effect of specific features such as headings, photographs and captions. **Comments on headings and captions should relate to the effects of specific words and phrases.**

Examiners are looking to reward evidence of the ability to analyse. Therefore, generic answers about the size of font or the colourfulness of pictures will not score highly. Candidates should be taught to identify specific items (e.g. particular words or aspects of pictures) and go on to analyse their precise effects.

Candidates should note the amount of space allocated to answering this question (just short of a page) and **select** relevant material for their answer accordingly.

Question 2(b), another '**How?**' question, is allocated 14 marks and more space for candidates to write their answers. The question, in broad terms, will focus on how the text uses information and language to convey its subject-matter. Successful answers will show understanding of how information and language contribute to the text's overall purpose and will include evidence of an analytical approach.

Stronger responses to language will include brief, pertinent quotations and precise analytical comment on the effects of specific words. Generalised comment about language and the mere cataloguing of devices or listing of 'effective' words will not score highly. The writing may well 'draw the reader in' and 'make you feel you are there', but such comments do not constitute analysis.

Higher tier - Writing

Time should be spent on careful planning. Candidates should be secure in their understanding of the task, the intended audience and the suggested format before they start writing. Clarity of thought concerning the intended effect on the reader will prove most helpful. Control of the material and structure will be important. A lively, engaging opening and an ending that provides some satisfaction, through either resolution or a dramatic twist indicates a confident writer and will be rewarded. Effective use of paragraphing often proves a significant discriminator between mark bands. **A carefully crafted but relatively brief piece of work will score higher than a longer, less purposeful piece that loses its way.** Ability to develop, adapt and sustain the material becomes significant in the higher bands. Above band 4 the examiner is looking to reward some ambition in the writing - a willingness to use language for effect is encouraged. Strong responses will often show some variety in stylistic features – use of direct speech or a direct address to the reader, perhaps. If a specific format is requested – a newspaper/magazine article, for example – it is not

necessary to make the piece 'look like' media text with columns and pictures, but it is certainly necessary that the writing should show some awareness of audience and ability to shape the audience response to what is being communicated.

Reading questions are directed towards a candidate's understanding of what qualities makes a piece of writing effective and Writing questions invite them to bring those qualities in their own work.

Foundation tier - Writing

Candidates should select **one** of the two Writing questions and on no account attempt both of them. One question will be related to the content of the reading material; the other will be on any topic.

Questions provided will range from informative writing, similar to 'inform, explain, describe' questions in the previous specification, to more open questions inviting candidates to give their views on a particular topic.

At least one of the questions will give a specific audience. Where no specific audience is indicated, they should bear in mind the real audience that is the examiner and write in a way that allows them to meet the assessment objectives.

Bullet points will be provided **only** in those questions where it is felt they will provide useful support.

Highlighting the key words of their chosen question is a useful starting-point for candidates to address the particular demands of the question.

Three lined pages are provided in the booklet after the Writing questions, partly so that the answers of those candidates with big handwriting can be contained within the answer booklet. Candidates should use some of this space to plan their answers, as this is more likely to lead to carefully-paragraphed writing with evidence of a conscious shaping of the material for a reader. Unplanned writing often leads to laboured or rambling pieces, and longer answers are more likely to contain a greater number of errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In practice, one and a half sides of writing should be enough to produce sustained and accurate writing which engages the reader, especially if time is allocated to planning and also to proof-reading.