

Retrospective

2009 Queensland Core Skills Test

Writing Task (WT) (Paper 1) (Part 3 of 5)

Writing Task (WT)

The Writing Task complements the other subtests by testing the ability to produce a piece of continuous English prose of about 600 words in length. Students write in response to an overall concept or theme and written and visual stimulus material. Each piece of stimulus material on the testpaper evokes a different aspect of the overall concept. Students may respond in any form or style other than poetry.

This section describes the 2009 testpaper and the writing that students produced in response to it. The comments on students' responses are based on an analysis of a statistically significant sample.

Provided in this section is a breakdown of student responses according to the stimulus items selected and the genres of responses produced. The marking guide indicating the criteria and standards that are applied is included here, together with graphs showing the criteria in which students had their best achievement. Finally, a selection of student responses has been included to exemplify successful writing as defined by the task requirements and the criteria.

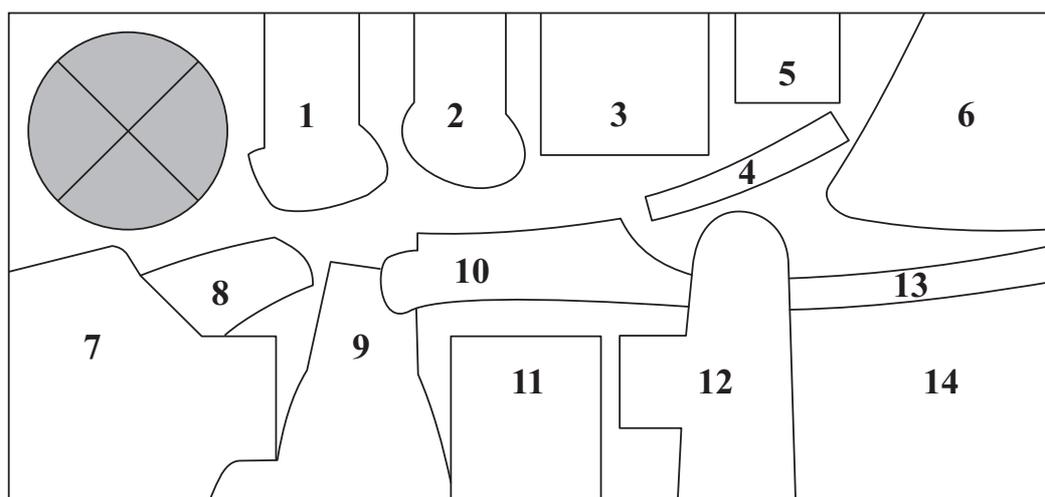
Overall concept: *Time*

The overall concept or topic of the 2009 testpaper was *Time*. This was judged to be something which all students could write about since it affects us all every day of our lives. Students would recognise that time can be both an abstract and a tangible concept.

Students could take any one of several approaches to the concept. For example, they could deal with existence and the relentless nature of time, explore events in history, or examine how people change (or don't change) with time. They could consider time as a period as reckoned by a conventional standard; this might suggest to them ideas of a race against time in sport or other activities, the significance of time intervals in science, or the influence on our lives and actions of time-related natural events such as the rotation of the earth. They could take time to be an event or occasion and focus on the significance of a particular moment in someone's life.

Diagram of the testpaper

The diagram below represents the 2009 testpaper. The 14 stimulus pieces are numbered for reference. All pieces relate to the overall concept of the testpaper.



Stimulus pieces

Overview

The diagram below shows the frequency (as a percentage) with which students in the sample group indicated each of the stimulus pieces as a starting point or resource for their writing. Most students make use of a combination of two or more stimulus pieces in developing a response to the testpaper; hence, the percentages shown in the diagram add up to more than 100%.



Indication of stimulus pieces as starting point or resource

Specific stimulus pieces and their response patterns

1. Life extension

The written text of this stimulus piece asks whether it is desirable for people to live significantly longer than they do now. The accompanying jar of face cream suggests the preoccupation that some people have with maintaining their youthful looks, even as they age.

Responses included feature articles about the importance of remaining or appearing young, short stories about life in the future when people live for hundreds of years, and essays about the impact of prolonged life expectancy on the environment and society.

2. Sundial

The sundial and the associated questions were thought likely to generate imaginative responses, including science fiction stories, or arguments about the benefits or problems generated by particular inventions associated with time.

Connections with time travel, comments on people's preoccupation with a "golden age" or speculations about the future were expected. Students also wrote reflections about life in the past or about advances in modern technology and conveniences.

3. Cave painting

This piece was expected to provide opportunities for students with interests in art or literature to focus on universal ideas or ubiquitous motifs in works they had studied.

Two common types of responses were stories with characters of different generations (mostly grandchildren and grandparents), often linked with stimulus piece 9, and essays commenting on literary works and themes.

4. Saturdays

This short statement was thought likely to generate some reflections on the delights of uncommitted time and possibly to remind some students of periods in their lives when their regular routines have been disrupted.

Rarely chosen on its own, this piece prompted comments about balancing work and other activities and the value of leisure time.

5. A time to talk

Robert Frost's poem, as relevant today as when it was written, advises that maintaining a friendship is more important than meeting the everyday demands of work and daily life. Responses were expected to deal with issues of prioritising work and friendship.

Despite providing students with the opportunity to continue the narrative established in the poem, this was the least popular stimulus piece. Incidentally, it is the only stimulus item without a visual image. Responses included short stories about valuing friendships and the time spent with loved ones.

6. Winning and losing

It was expected that many students responding to this stimulus piece would deal with the significance of time in victories and defeats.

The piece prompted many short stories and personal reflections about a variety of sporting competitions where the winner was decided by a small margin of time.

7. Narrative structure

This piece was expected to be considered in conjunction with other stimulus pieces. The visual image that accompanied the text, which was thought to be instantly recognisable to most students, provided for stories with a focus on time travel. The piece could also have prompted some analytical discussions of literary strategies or reviews of stories or novels that are unusual in their structure.

Many responses made specific reference to the movie *Back to the Future*. The piece also prompted responses such as a speech to a Year 12 cohort providing tips for effective story writing, narratives that were written in a non-linear, non-chronological manner, and numerous stories about time travel.

8. Sayings

These common sayings and phrases could be used alone or in conjunction with other pieces. Any one of them could prompt an exposition in the form of a discussion, debate or speech or could be incorporated as the theme for a speech, a feature article or an imaginative response such as a play or short story.

This stimulus piece was most commonly used in conjunction with other pieces and many titles of responses were gleaned from the variety of quotes. Similarly, where there was a moral or message in the response, it was often drawn from one of the phrases in stimulus piece 8 and presented in the final sentence/paragraph. Responses suffered when students attempted to incorporate several, or all, of the quotes.

9. Childhood

The image of two children idling away their time was thought likely to encourage students to draw on their personal experience for reflective pieces, stories and memoirs about the significance of time to children and adults, or expositions comparing the freedom of children's lives with the constraints of adult existence.

This proved to be the most popular stimulus piece, prompting students to write reflections about their childhoods, eulogies for loved ones, motivational speeches about never losing one's "inner child", and feature articles about the changing nature of childhood pastimes and friendships.

10. Music

The written text accompanying the music in this stimulus piece was expected to generate narratives and reflections on a piece of music that reminded the writer of a personal experience.

This was commonly used in conjunction with other pieces (most notably stimulus piece 9). It generated feature articles and essays about the music industry and explanations about time signatures used in different music styles. Also noteworthy were short stories about grandparents being prompted by pieces of music to reflect on their younger years for their grandchildren.

11. Rock formation

This stimulus piece focuses on physical records of change and time. It was thought that students with interests in history, earth science or geography might be especially drawn to it. The concluding comment of the written text was expected to prompt expositions or reports on what we have learned from the past that has influenced the present and could possibly have generated reports, conference papers, or articles for journals or newspapers.

As expected, responses to this piece included a number of essays and feature articles about the impact of climate change. On a different level, there were also responses that focused on the notion that the “future is not written in stone” by using it as the coda for stories and personal reflections.

12. Clock tower

The image of the Gympie Courthouse clock tower and the associated written text were thought likely to generate discussions of the significance of time to specific experiments and discoveries or of how our lives are regulated by clocks and calendars or stories in which keeping time or doing something at a particular time is crucial.

This piece was mostly used in combination with other pieces rather than on its own. However, it did prompt responses about the mechanical, quantifiable nature of time. It is worth noting that students who wrote about the experience of writing their responses to this testpaper indicated this piece as the stimulus for their writing.

13. Ecclesiastes

Students were thought likely to respond to this piece in conjunction with other pieces and, in doing so, to focus on the notion that there is a right time for everything and that everything happens when it should.

This was one of the least popular stimulus pieces, used only by a small number of students, and most often in combination with other pieces.

14. Dali

This stimulus piece was expected to generate expository, reflective or imaginative responses about issues related to youth and age, the passing of time and how we can live our lives to make the best use of the time we have.

Responses tended to be prompted by either the artwork or the text, rather than by a combination of the two. They included reviews of artworks and artists, essays about the technique of “time in art”, some making glancing references to the featured landscape in the Dali painting (often as the setting for a futuristic story). The written text proved more popular, stimulating responses discussing the effective use of time or commenting on the fixed rate of time or the notion that “time is money”. There was a tendency for students to engage in broad philosophical musings about the essence of time when responding to this item, particularly in some of the lower achieving responses.

Touring the testpaper

A common question about the Writing Task is what is the “right” number of stimulus pieces to respond to in order to achieve the best, or highest, results. While there can be no definitive answer, the evidence gathered from student responses certainly sheds light upon the potential impact of the practice of “touring the testpaper”.

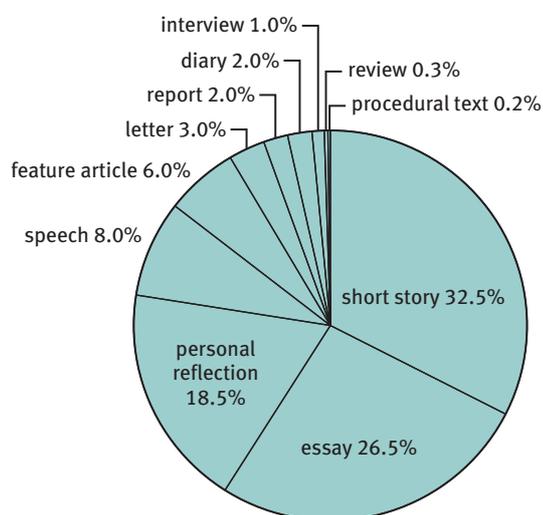
In the responses where students identified, and responded to, five or more stimulus pieces, 95% attained no higher than the mid-achievement range. The criterion that scored lowest, for one-third of these students, was Structuring and sequencing. This can be attributed to students repeating words, phrases and ideas and producing responses that lacked a clear shape (e.g. introduction, body and conclusion) or linking of ideas. In some instances, it was possible to follow students’ tours around the testpaper, where each individual selected piece was identifiable as a stand-alone point of discussion.

A key problem with touring the testpaper is that, even though each stimulus piece is designed to generate responses based on the common concept, *Time*, the individual nature of each piece means that there will very likely be little in common between them. The stimulus pieces are chosen specifically to provide and prompt a broad and varied range of ideas; therefore, selecting several pieces decreases the likelihood of being able to tie them together successfully and cohesively with a clear and controlled focus.

Of those responses from the sample that were graded in the higher achieving range, 73% identified, and responded to, just one or two stimulus pieces. *Recollection*, published in this report, provides an example of how a student can respond successfully to just one piece. However, what readers can also infer is that the student has made incidental, and therefore subtle, links with another piece (stimulus piece 7) without actually identifying it as a related stimulus piece.

Choice of genre

In 2009, an objective of the Writing Task research project was to identify specifically the genres or forms that students produced, and to discover how common these genres were. In previous years, both form and purpose (e.g. expository, argumentative) were identified. Eleven common – and expected – genres were chosen for the purpose of the research project this year to provide specific information about the types of responses students actually write.



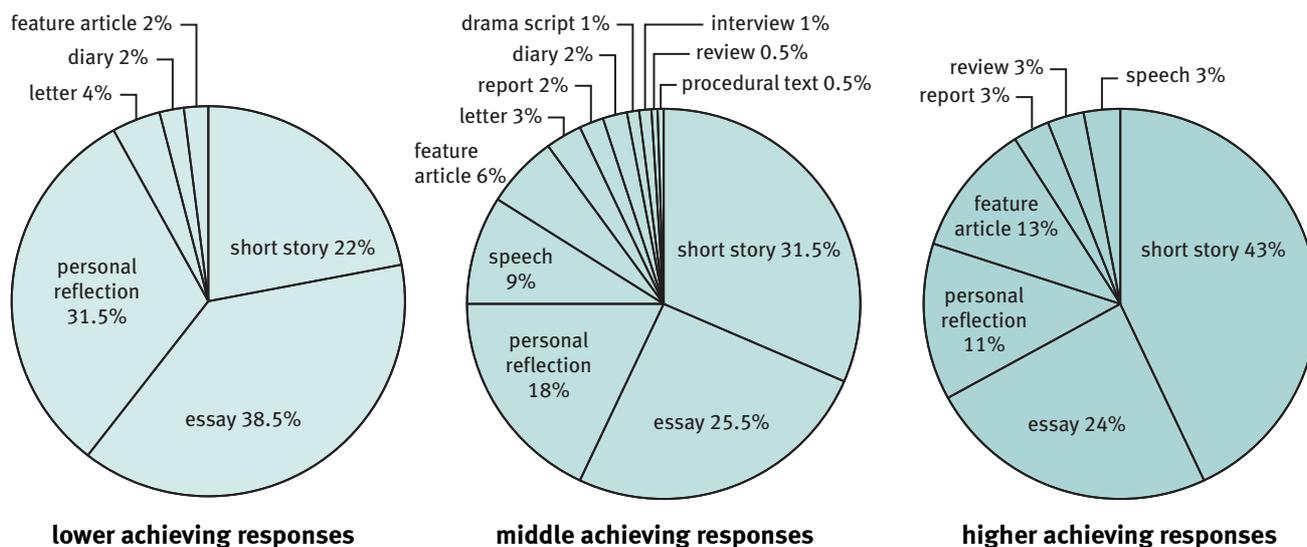
Popularity of genre: total sample

Despite the freedom that students have to write in any prose form they wish, there is a pattern in the types of writing being produced each year. In 2009, the most popular genre choices were short stories, essays and personal reflections. The least popular genres were procedural texts, reviews and interviews. It was also noted that there was a decrease in the number of letters or diary entries amongst the responses.

The sample responses provide evidence that, to be successful in their writing, students need to establish a definite context, including clear purpose and audience.

Student achievement and genre

The diagrams below indicate the genres used in lower, middle and higher achieving responses. Note that percentages shown are rounded.



Short story — The short story proved to be the most popular genre, with one-third of all responses taking this form. The most successful of these provided vivid imagery (incorporating the five senses in describing situations, events, etc.), a tight structure and, often, subtle connections to the concept and stimulus pieces. A number of stories took on a cyclic narrative structure, largely in response to stimulus piece 7. Many lower achieving stories suffered from the writer having incorporated too much detail rather than keeping events succinct. Students must also keep in mind that the primary purpose of short story writing is to entertain an audience.

Essay — Not surprisingly, this was a very popular form of response. Students are familiar with essays across the subjects they study and this form can be written for a variety of purposes and audiences. Essays that were well written followed a clear structure with an introduction (including a thesis statement), the body of writing that contained an explanation of main points, and a concluding paragraph that presented a summary.

Personal reflection — In many instances, personal reflections took the form of narrative or anecdotal prose and consequently had quite a “loose” structure. In other instances, there were responses such as eulogies (often in response to stimulus piece 9) and interior monologues. Personal reflections were less common amongst higher achieving responses than amongst lower achieving responses.

Speeches — The range of possible speeches is broad, and this year saw examples of motivational speeches, speeches delivered to a committee, the board of a company or organisation, students, etc. Those responses that were most successful established and maintained a clear (and not contrived) context, purpose and audience.

Feature articles — Those responses identified as feature articles followed the expected structural guidelines, including establishing themselves as public texts, and presenting opinions. Although a number of feature articles followed layout conventions, for example using columns and by-lines, this is not essential. However, structuring and sequencing may be influenced by writing paragraphs to suit the genre.

Letters — As shown in previous years, responding in letter form does not usually allow a student to demonstrate a broad range of vocabulary. Responsiveness may also suffer due to the contrived nature of many letters. There were no letters in the higher achieving sample. There was a tendency for students to begin with a salutation, but then to write personal reflections or short stories, forgetting the conventions of letter writing, including the need to write for the identified audience. Some students cleverly presented emails between two or more people which allowed them to demonstrate a shift in voice and tone.

Diary — As with letter writing, diary entries do not usually allow students the opportunity to demonstrate a broad vocabulary and there is a tendency to recount events step by step. The more successful diary entries were those written “in character”, rather than from the perspective of the student writer; however, there were no diary entries identified in the higher achieving group. Students should keep in mind that diary writers in real life rarely use the “Dear Diary” salutation, which is regarded as an immature and contrived device.

Reports — A small number of the responses in the sample were reports, ranging from scientific or medical reports, to information reports and newspaper reports. It is possible that some students may have intended to write a report but ended up producing an essay instead. Depending on the nature (intent) of the report, students need to establish clearly their context, purpose and audience. In many instances, the use of sub-headings and final recommendations would be expected.

Review — Surprisingly, there were very few reviews amongst the sample scripts. These tended to be reviews of films, and especially of *Back to the Future*, but they included analyses of changes in popular culture over time (e.g. in fashion, art, music). Some responses intended as reviews may have been included in the survey as feature articles.

Procedural texts — It was expected this year that the concept *Time* would prompt some procedural responses (steps for successful time management, perhaps), but this did not occur in the sample. The very small number of procedural texts written mostly offered insights to the steps that need to be taken to create a better future based on present and past experiences.

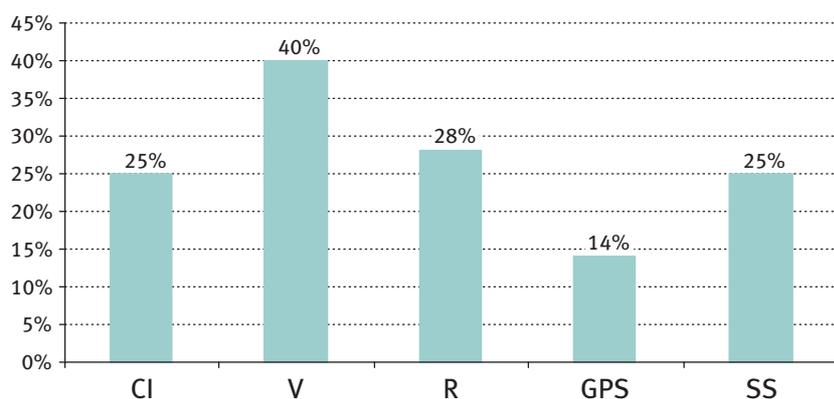
Student achievement in criteria

The more successful responses are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 74). The criteria are Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); and Structuring and sequencing (SS) plus Length (L).

For the responses sampled, the data from the grades awarded for the criteria were analysed, first for the total set and then for each of the lower achieving, middle achieving and higher achieving sets. The diagram below shows, for each criterion, the percentage of responses for which that criterion represented the highest achievement. Because many students gain identical grades across several criteria, the percentages shown in the diagram add up to more than 100%.

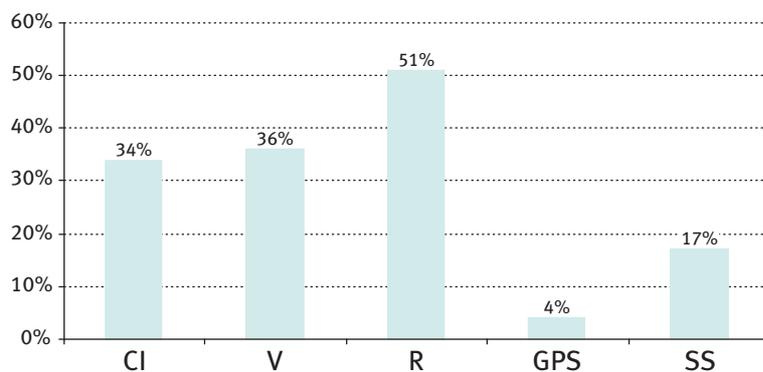
For the total sample, Vocabulary was the criterion in which the greatest percentage of responses (40%) demonstrated highest achievement. Grammar, punctuation, spelling was the criterion in which the lowest percentage of responses (14%) demonstrated best achievement. This criterion was consistently the least successful criterion, regardless of the overall quality of the responses.

Best performing criteria: total sample



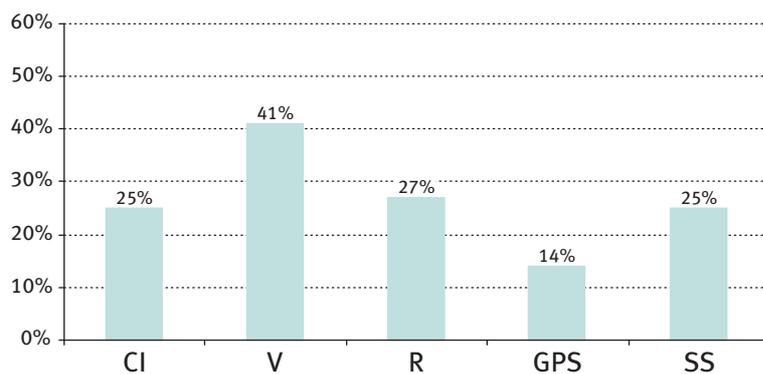
Overwhelmingly, the lower achieving responses gained their highest grade for Responsiveness. A large proportion of lower achieving responses indicated that the writing was in response to numerous stimulus items. Evidently, this alone does not ensure successful writing.

Best performing criteria: low achieving



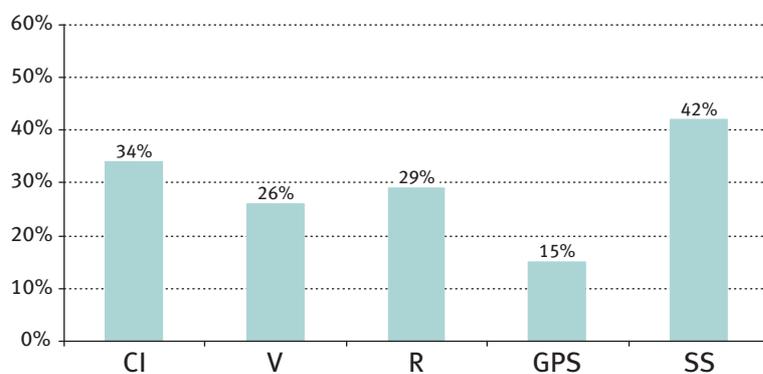
For the middle achieving responses, as for the total sample, it was Vocabulary in which the greatest percentage of responses (41%) demonstrated highest achievement.

Best performing criteria: mid achieving



The data for the higher achieving set of responses showed that it was the criterion of Structuring and sequencing in which the greatest percentage of responses (42%) gained their highest grade, followed by the criterion Central idea. This seems to indicate that students who produce highly successful responses are able to effectively structure and sequence the development of a central idea.

Best performing criteria: high achieving



Achievement in specific criteria

Central idea

Markers ask three key questions of the responses they are reading: What is this about? How well is it developed? Where does it go? In assessing achievement in this criterion, markers are not judging the quality of the idea, but how well that idea has been presented and developed. The development of the central idea of the piece of writing should be deliberate, focused and have a clear direction and resolution. Responses achieving in the mid-range were found to be slow to start, repetitive or to have no clear resolution or conclusion. Lower achieving responses were those that had no identifiable central idea or had many ideas that had not been developed.

Vocabulary

Markers look for effective language choices: the right word in the right place, selected and placed for effect. Vocabulary considered most effective may be simple or specialist; the key is that it should be deliberately chosen, controlled and discriminating. Effective vocabulary includes the use of appropriate prepositions and linking words as well as verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives.

Responses achieving middle grades for vocabulary used reasonably clear and appropriate vocabulary that conveyed meaning but perhaps lacked variety or control. At the lower levels, vocabulary tended to be inappropriate to the piece, demonstrating incorrect choices and misuse of language. It should be noted that there is no penalty for the use of expletives; however, like all other vocabulary choices, these must also be selected for effect and be suitable to the context of the piece of writing.

Responsiveness

The most important consideration for this criterion is that the student's writing responds to the testpaper. Indeed, Responsiveness is weighted more heavily than the other criteria to help ensure that what the students write is a response to the testpaper on the day. Markers look for evidence of what students have done with the ideas presented in the testpaper. There must be a strong and sustained connectedness to both the concept *and* the stimulus pieces to achieve most credit in this criterion. Responsiveness can be explicit or subtle but it must be integral to the response.

Middle grades in this criterion result from weak connectedness to the concept and stimulus pieces or connectedness to either the concept or stimulus pieces. It is important to note that students who chose to "tour the testpaper", that is, those who selected a large number of stimulus pieces to respond to, ran the risk of not demonstrating strong responsiveness. Similarly, repetition of the concept (e.g. the word "time") was not enough to establish responsiveness. "Topping and tailing" where students introduce the concept and/or stimulus piece at the beginning and conclude by restating or referring to the concept and/or stimulus piece with little connection in the body of work, is unlikely to establish effective responsiveness.

Grammar, punctuation, spelling

In this criterion, Grammar is considered more important than Punctuation which, in turn, is considered more important than Spelling in determining the grade. Markers look for how well students demonstrate a command over the conventions of writing (at within-sentence level) and for their ability to punctuate and spell correctly.

To achieve at the highest level, students needed to be precise in their usage, making few errors. These students demonstrated an understanding of using the range of conventions to achieve particular effects. Middle achieving responses in this criterion had errors that impeded readers' understanding of the text and many demonstrated a lack of variety in sentence construction. Inconsistency in tense and point of view, overuse (or underuse) of capital letters and fragmented sentences were examples of the errors in responses that performed poorly in this criterion.

Structuring and sequencing

In essence, the criterion Structuring and sequencing relates to the “architecture” of the piece – the arrangement, links and flow of ideas. The response should demonstrate evidence of clear planning through deliberate, fluent and logical sequencing of ideas. Structuring and sequencing will be affected by choice of genre and may be affected by the overall length of the piece, especially where there is repetition of, or gaps in, ideas. Repetition, poor paragraphing or a seemingly random organisation of ideas results in a response that achieves at the lower levels in this criterion. Students should commit time to creating and developing a clear plan for their writing.

Length

Student responses should be approximately 600 words in length. Responses between 500 words and 750 words incur no penalty. Responses that are either too short or too long run the risk of being weak in other criteria – especially Responsiveness and Structuring and sequencing.

Criteria and standards

Each response is marked by three markers. Each marker provides either four criteria-based grades or three criteria-based grades plus a judgment about length. Therefore, different mixes are judged in each of the three readings. Markers make a judgment about the contribution to the holistic worth of the response of each of the criteria they are to consider. On the marksheet they record each of these as a grade (from 1 to 6) with a qualifier (+, 0, -) for each grade. If required, they make a decision about the length of the response.

The following table shows the percentage of students who achieved the various grades for each of the criteria.

	Grade					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
CI	0.6	13.1	53.6	29.7	2.8	0.2
V	0.5	11.3	68.7	18.1	1.3	0.1
R	0.6	10.4	53.4	32.2	3.1	0.2
GPS	0.3	9	57	29.8	3.7	0.2
SS	0.5	10	53.1	32.6	3.6	0.2

The table below shows the percentage of students who achieved the various grades overall.

	Grade					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	0.2	8.4	62.6	27.1	1.6	0.1

2009

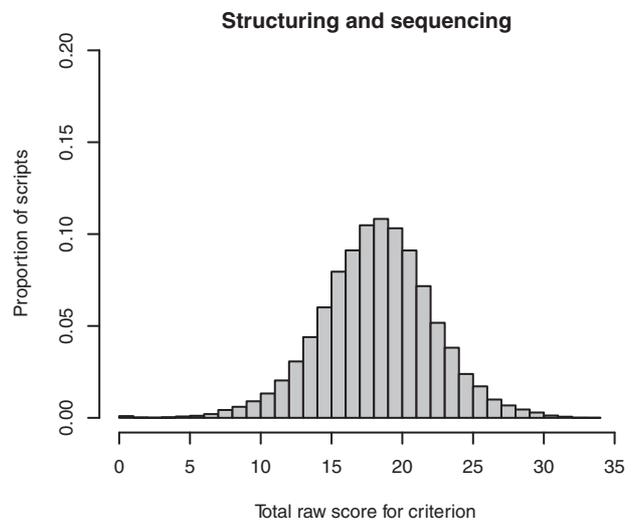
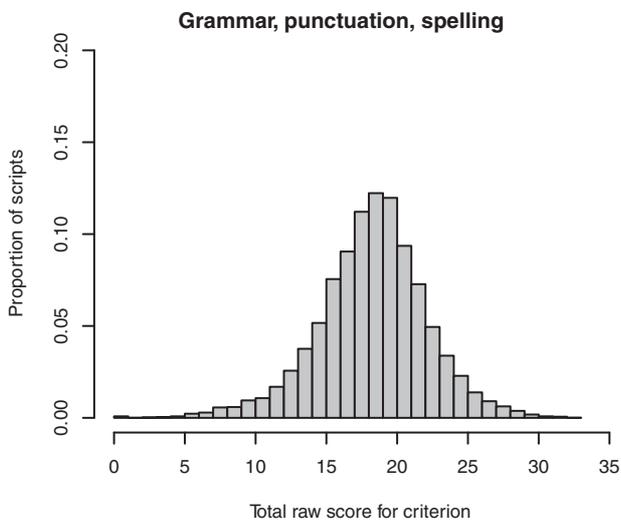
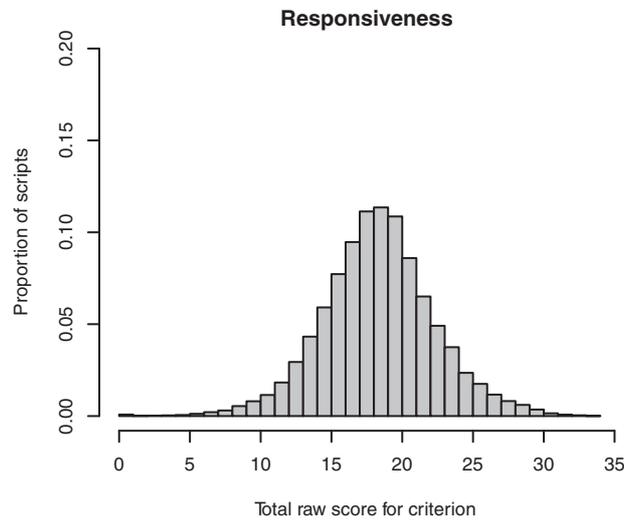
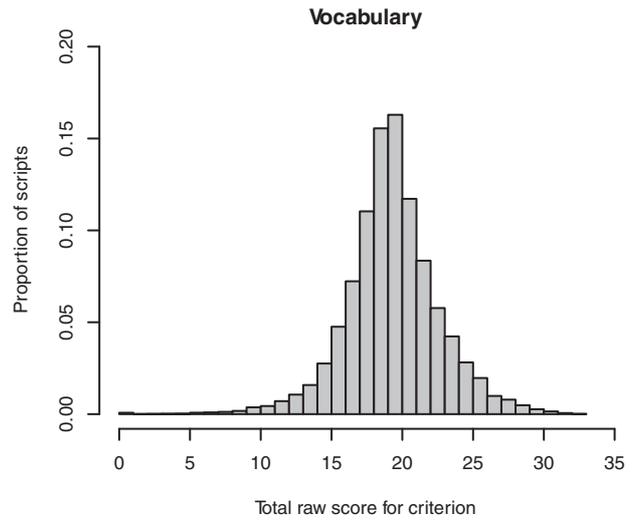
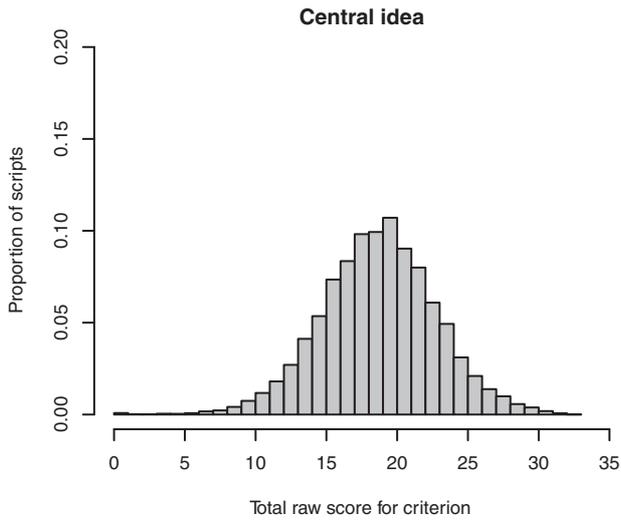
Writing Task marking guide: Criteria and standards

Grading a script

- Read the script as a whole.
- Think about the worth of the script holistically.
- Make a judgment about the contribution to the holistic worth of the script of each criterion you are considering (CI, V, R, GPS, SS).
- Assign a grade and a qualifier, then record each judgment.

CENTRAL IDEA		VOCABULARY		RESPONSIVENESS		GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING		STRUCTURING & SEQUENCING		Decision about ...
For a 1 +		For a 1 +		For a 1 +		For a 1 +		For a 1 +		LENGTH
the writing demonstrates the deliberate, focused development of a clear central idea (explicit or implicit).	the writing demonstrates the use of words selected for their effect and exactly fitted to their location (the right words in the right places).	the writing demonstrates sensitivities to nuances of the concept and stimulus material.	the writing consistently demonstrates a command of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the conventions of writing (subject/verb agreement, participle use, antecedent agreement, pronoun choice, tense, etc.) • correct punctuation • correct spelling. 	the writing demonstrates coherence and cohesion through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • controlled structuring; and • deliberate sequencing of ideas and images. 	about right 500–750 words					
identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed	controlled (discriminating, imaginative)	strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material	precise and effective use	fluent, logical and flexible	too long 750–1000 words					
identifiable but unevenly developed	appropriate	connectedness to the concept and stimulus material	lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning	weaknesses are evident	too short 400–500 words					
identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident	inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times	connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; or weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material	lapses obtrude and detract from meaning	weaknesses detract	far too long > 1000 words					
not identifiable	limited	no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material	inept	incoherent	far too short < 400 words					

Distribution of raw grades in each criterion



Selected student responses

The responses to the 2009 Writing Task that follow were selected from those that met the standards for successful writing as defined by the criteria and standards for judging responses.

These complete responses appear in their original handwritten form. They may contain errors in expression and factual inaccuracies but, for the sake of authenticity, they have been published as they were written.

The selection of these examples does not indicate a preference for any particular form of writing, nor are the sentiments expressed in these responses necessarily endorsed by the QSA. Before publication, the QSA attempted to establish, but cannot guarantee, the originality of the writing in the responses.

Response 1

Infinity, Mr Grey is a narrative with the central idea that the human desire for immortality may backfire. When Mr Grey finds his first grey hair, he thinks that the recently implanted Ad-Infinitem™ Chronophages is faulty. However, he discovers that the promise of immortality that came with the product did not include a guarantee of youth. As he gradually comes to realise the implications of this, his anger turns to despair. The development of the central idea to its chilling resolution is deliberate and the use of simple, direct language is effective.

Response 2

Austen wants out! is a literary analysis. It has a strong central idea, that the novelist Jane Austen was a woman who seems to have been born out of her time. She “dreamed of other times” and, in *Pride and Prejudice*, she expressed her beliefs about women and society through her character, Elizabeth Bennet. The succinct thesis statement is followed by a logical and fluent progression of ideas. The use of quotes and page references (mostly accurate) adds to the strength of the writing.

Response 3

Life: a time restricted or a timeless journey? is an exposition that initially questions whether time governs our lives. It then examines Christian and Buddhist beliefs in the importance of living a “good life” in order to attain a timeless existence after death. The writer is knowledgeable about the subject matter and expresses clear views in a straightforward way. Vocabulary that is sometimes complex has been chosen and placed with discrimination.

Response 4

Recollection illustrates the effective incorporation of a flashback in its fictional reflection on events of the past and present. There are subtle connections throughout to the concept and to the piece indicated (stimulus piece 10). As the narrator moves between the two scenes and times, it is never made clear which wars are referred to, thus reinforcing the impression of timelessness. Atmosphere is evoked mainly through descriptions of the actions in each of the contrasting scenes. Language use is simple, accurate and economical.

Response 5

When Winter Comes consists of four separate but well connected descriptions of people and events as viewed by four people of different ages, each one observing and commenting on some of the others, and reflecting on their own past or looking to their future. Each observer represents a different season of the year and each uses the quote from *Ecclesiastes* in a comment on their stage of life. The clear central idea is very deliberately developed and careful structuring and sequencing results in a cohesive piece of writing.

INFINITY, MR. GREY

Mr. Grey awakes in a cold, bright white room. The room is sparsely decorated - only a bed, a white vinyl chair and large black speakers for an intercom. Above him there is a skylight - through it, he sees that the sky is stormy. The room is quiet; the only sounds ~~are~~ ^{are} the ticking of a wall clock and some light jazz piped through the speakers. Suddenly, the intercom flickers on.

"Hello, Mr. Grey," says a soft spoken male voice. "Welcome to the first day of the rest of your life."

Mr. Grey smiles at the old cliché.

The voice continues; "Not that days will be remarkable for you now. We are pleased to say that the implantation of the Ad-Infinity™ Chronophages was a success."

Mr. Grey is pleased.

"You can enjoy the rest of your life free of the fear of death that pervades all mankind," the voice says pleasantly. "You are now immortal. You will live forever. You can not die."

Mr. Grey congratulates himself on his success with a pat on the back.

"But," says the voice, its tone changing, "How will you appreciate your time on earth when time now has no meaning?"

Mr. Grey becomes aware that the ticking of the clock has grown louder.

"I shall experience each second," he says, "safe in the knowledge that I have all the time in the world."

The voice chuckles. "Very well, Mr. Grey. Very well."

There is silence but for the ticking of the clock.

Mr. Grey gets dressed in clothes he finds neatly folded on the chair. # There is a small bathroom connected to his room, where he brushes his teeth and combs his hair. To his surprise, he finds a grey hair in his comb.

"What's that, Mr. Grey?" the voice taunts when he returns. "A grey hair? How amusing. Did you think ~~at~~ eternity meant eternal youth?"

Mr. Grey is angry. He demands ~~an~~^{an} explanation. He paid good money for this operation, and now he finds it didn't work.

"Oh, but it did work, Mr. Grey. Don't you feel it? The long, slow ache of time on weary bones? The dragging down, the aging? It will continue, forever. The body, Mr. Grey, will always break down. It will not stop now, but it will always break down."

Mr. Grey shakes his head but a mental image raises itself to his eyes - himself, ancient and decrepit. His teeth are gone. His body is skeletal. He reels backwards, terrified.

"The body," the voice says, "will wither with the ravages of time, and the mind will melt away. But you will be alive. Oh yes. For aeons and aeons. You may be no more than a husk. But you will be alive, Mr. Grey. Is that not what you wanted?"

Mr. Grey backs away from the speaker. He screams, a low, primal sound. He stares at his hands, touches his face, ~~his hands~~, his clothes. He ditches at Time but it seems to pull away, as if saying, "You rejected me. What do I owe you?"

He screams again and dashes his head against the wall, again and again and again, for hours, or minutes, or years. He can not tell.

"And the skies will boil and the earth shall crumble!" the speaker ~~screams~~^{screams} like an avenging prophet, "and still he shall not die! Time will turn everything to dust, but he will not be moved! How grand the human species is, to turn its back on time!"

Mr. Grey ~~slides~~^{slides} to the ground, his forehead bloodied. There is quiet, but for the animal meaning of Mr. Grey, and the ticking of the clock.

"Now," ~~said~~^{says} the voice, "You have all the time in the world."

Mr. Grey ~~shudders~~^{shudders}, then ~~was~~^{is} still.

"You really should have thought this through, Mr. Grey," the voice says. The clock ticks.

Austen Wants Out!

It has always been common for authors to unveil themselves in the characters of their novels. When considering the character of Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bennet in Pride and Prejudice by the acclaimed English novelist Jane Austen, it is possible to understand Austen's social frustration at the societal values of Regency England. Despite the Regency setting of Pride and Prejudice, it is clear Austen "dreamed of other times", and this is largely ~~due to~~ reflected in Lizzy's modernistic beliefs and attitudes.

Elizabeth Bennet's egalitarian attitude throughout Pride and Prejudice allows an insight into Austen's criticism of Regency society and suggests her longing for a future void of its social beliefs and values. Towards the end of the novel Elizabeth is confronted by an upper-class woman named Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who attempts to dissuade her from becoming ^{engaged} ~~planned~~ to Mr Darcy on the grounds that her social ~~factor~~ shortcomings would ruin his reputation. Although, when reflecting on Regency ideals, this request would be considered logical and reasonable, Elizabeth reacts with shocked disbelief, and responds saying "He is a gentleman, I am a gentleman's daughter, so far we are equal."⁽⁴⁾ Such a blatant ~~response~~ ^{response} would be considered extremely rude at the time, yet the reader is positioned to agree with Lizzy. This reflects Austen's disregard of Regency society, and through Lizzy's egalitarianism she is able to ~~(articulate)~~ convey her longing for a world free of prejudice and snobbery.

A second characteristic of Lizzy's which displays Austen's modern sensibilities is her intelligence. Due to Regency patriarchy, it was highly irregular for females to be educated by a school or

university, and spent the majority of their time sewing, learning music and socialising. However, Elizabeth challenges this by ~~Engage~~ engaging in a great deal of reading out of her father's library, and through this she establishes a degree of intelligence altogether absent from the other female characters of the novel. It is this strength of mind that attracts Mr Darcy, whom she finally marries. An example of Lizzy's intelligence occurs on page 51 of the novel, during a walk with a friend which is interrupted by Mr Darcy and Caroline Bingley. When the path in the garden becomes narrow, Elizabeth happily leaves the party, as "the picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth". As Elizabeth is referring to an artistic style which largely depicts cows in pastures, her cultural awareness and intelligence is displayed. So too is her wit in associating the aristocratic trio with cows. This "swiftness of mind" (pg 233) is what Darcy finds most attractive about Elizabeth, and what initially drew his attention towards her. For a woman to attract a wealthy and upper-class man such as Darcy with intelligence alone is not reflective of Regency attitudes, further suggesting Austen's desire for social evolution or existence in ~~(a different)~~ an alternate period of time, in which looks, affluence and ~~(essentially)~~ ^{essentially} useless skills weren't important means of securing connubial felicity.

Probably the best indicator of Austen's hatred of Regency attitudes and desire for more modern sensibilities is the longevity of Pride and Prejudice's popularity. Though written many hundreds of years ago, the novel is still extremely prevalent in Western culture today, and readers continue to derive enormous amounts of enjoyment and satisfaction ~~(in fact)~~ from its pages. This is largely due to Austen's modern ~~(sensibilities)~~ ^{attitudes}, and her characters ~~(are)~~ (especially Elizabeth) have attributes which a modern audience can relate to. ~~(and agree with)~~ ~~(It is (clearly) as if Austen could)~~ Austen clearly desired greater ~~(social/cultural)~~ freedom ~~(whether it was)~~ from the constraints

(and limitations) of Regency England's societal customs, - freedom from a world than fed on the pride and prejudices of its citizens.

Using the voice of ~~the~~^{her} main character, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen indicates a strong frustration at the period she lived in and the limitations this had on people's ability to achieve lifelong happiness. Lizzy, however, manages to overcome Regency attitudes, and this is predominately ~~(through)~~ through her egalitarianism and intelligence, attributes which ~~(impl)~~ indicate Austen's modern sensibilities. ~~(Because of this)~~ it is reasonable to assume Austen dreamed of alternate times, and ~~(her writing reflects this.)~~ her construction of the character Elizabeth reflects this. This is why Pride and Prejudice continues to be a popular novel to this day, and will undoubtedly continue to be so throughout time.

LIFE: A TIME RESTRICTED OR A TIMELESS JOURNEY?

The reality of a finite existence is a challenging notion for many people to cope with. Some believe that ~~this~~ the length of this existence is predetermined by a higher power or deity, whilst others believe that our time on earth is a direct consequence of our actions. Common to both of these viewpoints is a recognition that time ultimately governs our life. But what if one were to say that our physical human existence is not the end of our time...

As a result of the confronting reality that death ~~results~~ brings about a cessation of time and space, many philosophical notions have been created by humans to help deal with this concept. One such philosophical notion is a belief in human immortality; primarily through religion. All of the world's five mainstream religions believe in some form of existence after death in a supra-material realm of mind or spirit. Not only does this deal with our time after death, but also with how we ~~spend our~~ live our life in the here and now.

The general Christian belief concerning the hereafter is that the human person is a composite of body and soul, and at the moment of death this unity splits and the soul proceeds to either heaven or

hell. As articulated by Jesus in John chapter 6, verse 40 of the New Testament;

"And this is the will of him who sent me. That anyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life."

What the Bible is ultimately saying to its followers here, is whilst we as humans are mortal in nature and subject to a finite time here on earth, we have the ability to spend time eternally with God in heaven, by living a life in Christ.

The religious concept of existence without the limit of time is not confined to Christianity. Buddhists believe in reincarnation; the process of being reborn time and again in various times and settings. The fundamental teaching of Buddhism is that life is suffering (or *dukkha*), and that the only way to end this suffering is to detach oneself from life and reach the eternal bliss of Nirvana.

Both of these religious examples have explicated a belief in an existence after mortal life, but this 'eternal' existence also directly affects how one spends their time in the immediate, physical life. For Christians who believe in life after death, there is the belief that in order to achieve perpetual existence, one must lead a "good life" - but what essentially is a "good life?" It is believed that when God created man, he gave man co-creative powers to rule over creation

with him, with an ultimate purpose of achieving God's plan for existence. Therefore if one wants to live a "good life" in the Christian faith, one should attempt to live their life in accordance with God's plan for creation, as articulated by the Bible and other Christian doctrines.

Living a "good life" in the Buddhist faith is living a life free from greed, delusion, attachment and hate. These generate negative karma, and one cannot reach eternal life in Nirvana until this negative karma is negated by positive karma. The way to do this in Buddhism is by following the Noble Eightfold Path, which describes the way to live in order to reach Nirvana. It can be seen that for both religions, one must live their ~~own~~ immediate physical life in accordance with their respective doctrines in order to reach the timeless existence associated with the hereafter.

Ultimately, no one really knows when our time is truly up. The question of destiny is so intrinsically unresolved in the human psyche that a multitude of philosophical notions have been created to help answer it. The response of Christianity and Buddhism to this question is that there is a spiritual existence that transcends time and space, but in order to attain this existence, one must live according to their respective religious doctrine during their time as a mortal and finite human being.

Recollection

Why am I here? As I sat in a puddle of freezing water, staring at the cold gray mud of the trench, I could not help but wonder. Desperately, I searched my mind for a plausible reason for the loss of life I was witnessing and found nothing. I turned my head to gaze down the trench at my fellow soldiers, but instead I was greeted with a gust of wind that carried with it the stench of gunpowder and rotting flesh. Bang! My grip involuntarily fastened around the chipped wood of my rifle and in doing so, sent half a dozen splinters into my already bleeding hands. That was the fourth shell which had landed near me this morning; after weeks of the same, I was almost deaf. In stark contrast to the great symphony of chaos outside the trench, were the men inside it; not one of them, including me, had spoken for hours. Looking at them now, it seemed as if each was in his own little world. Sitting in the mud, slowly losing their hope, courage and faith; the barrier between us was almost visible. I was just about to lose myself when I heard the faint song of the man beside me.

"Oro se do bhattha bhatte," he sang, "oro se do bhattha bhatte." I knew it well, from a long time ago...

* * *

I was only six years old and it was Easter Sunday; a young boy's dream. My entire extended family had gathered and that was no mean feat. Included amongst them were thirty first-cousins, partners of older members and aunties

wearing too much red lipstick, eager to kiss their favourite nephew. I was headed towards the kitchen, to see if I might grab some chocolate brownies before they were devoured by those outside. As I entered the kitchen I could smell them; rich and heavy with the entire block of chocolate they contained. After a quick search I found the precious baking tray but was interrupted before I could satisfy my tastebuds.

"There you are, Seán!" My auntie had found me, "You've grown so much! Come and give your auntie a big kiss." By the time she had finished that sentence, I was long gone.

Although I had escaped my auntie's affections, I was still hungry and I marched outside to find some food. I stepped outside into the sun and had to squint whilst my eyes adjusted. All throughout the garden were groups of children who were laughing, running and were just, as my grandmother would say, "happy out." It looked like fun yet, it did not look like food, so I ran over to the main table and jumped up into a seat. One of my uncles, who had obviously been in my predicament before, served me a generous portion of roast lamb and mushy peas; at that time I thought I had found heaven. It didn't take long for me to finish my plate and just as I was contemplating 'seconds' an unfamiliar sound caught my ear. The sound was coming from the living room and I could see my grandmother sitting in her chair; I ventured inside to investigate. As I peered around the living room door, I could see the origin of the sound. My grandmother's old record player was producing the most beautiful music I had ever heard. Seeing my little face peeping through the doorway, my grandmother called me over and placed me gently on her lap.

"This was your grandfather's favourite song," she said "he would sit here and listen to it for hours at a time."

I listened carefully to the words, "Oro se do bhatba bhaile, oro se do bhatba bhaile."

"What does it mean grandma?" I asked

"It is an old song, welcoming back those who fought for our land not so long ago," her eyes glistened, "your grandfather was one of them." I began to wish that I had not asked. My grandmother had lost her husband during a war and it often made her sad. This time though, something was different, her face was content. She held me close and we sat and listened to the music; I wanted that moment to last forever.

* * *

I joined in the song of the man beside me, feebly at first, but it soon rose in volume and more voices joined the chorus. Now I knew why I was here and what I was fighting for; it seemed that every other man in that trench knew as well. We were fighting for our families; those we loved and those who had gone before us. We were fighting for the land of our ancestors and for our right to live in it long into the future. As our voices soared I saw the barriers between us shatter; it was as if all of us shared the same memory, albeit with our own families. This music triggered a spirit that raised us up and bound us as one. With each single man possessing the strength, courage and determination of many, we scaled those cold gray walls together and charged into the fray.

Response 5

When Winter Comes.

Autumn

Slowly they dribble in: suits and ties, briefcases and heels, checking their watches impatiently. Changing my briefcase to my other hand I check ^{my watch}; 5:22. The bus is five minutes late. At least I got a seat. The sun shines warmly and my scalp prickles beneath my toupe. I give it a tentative pat, hoping to satisfy the itch without drawing attention to it. An old lady slowly hobbles toward the bus stop, fighting through the gathering crowd, aiming for the shady patch on the other side. I stand, we exchange smiles and she gratefully accepts my seat. She is worn and tired, but she looks content. There it goes again. The darn toupe! Itching. My hair will grow back soon, I hope, then it'll all be over. I guess it's what you get really. You can't live a life like I did: drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, without expecting it to come back and bite you. Hard. I don't regret it though. I've had my time.

"For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven."

My time is passing.

Winter

The sun beats down on me, as I drag my protesting bones toward the crowded bus stop. I remember the days as a young girl, when I

Loved the heat. Not anymore, now it tires me, everything does. A kind young man stands for me, offers a sad smile and scratches his head. I sit, and my body sinks gratuitously into the seat. Relief. I'm not scared to die. I've lived, and lived well. I am content to let the young ones take over.

"For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven."

My time has passed.

Spring

On a flat patch of grass, two boys, barely even ten years old are playing soccer. There's something mesmerising about them; how they smile so openly and trustfully. Sometimes they plod around like they have all the time in the world, others they race around excitedly, as though this is their last minute on earth and they're keen to experience everything before it ends. I check my watch. She's late. I'll bet those boys can't even tell the time. If they can I'll bet they don't think about it. I take off my watch and put it in my pocket; she'll get here when she gets here. I've got all day. Those kids could turn out to be champions one day, or soldiers, doctors, scientists... But not today.

"For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven"

Their time is coming.

Summer

What a glorious day! I was late, but I'm here now, that's what matters. We lie together, the cool, fresh grass soft against our backs. My head is on his chest, rising and falling with each deep breathe. Looking down the hill, and out over the city we see the suits, lining up at the bus stop, continuing their endless monotony. Day in, day out: shirt, tie, jacket, briefcase, bus, desk, bus, T.V. I never want to end up like that. A man stands for an old lady. He must be in his mid forties, I reckon. He was fit once, you can tell, but now he stands hunched and sad. If you look close enough, you can see they all do. There's a lot to learn from them, their generation; live your life, respect our planet, use your time, or before you know it it'll all be gone. They've had their turn, it's time for a change. Our change.

For everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose
under heaven."

Our time is now.