

Retrospective

2010 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 students' abilities to produce a piece of continuous English prose about 600 words in length. Students write in response to written and visual stimulus material on an overall concept or theme. Each piece of stimulus material evokes a different aspect of the overall concept. Students respond in any form or style other than poetry to this concept and to as many stimulus pieces as they wish.

This section describes the 2010 testpaper and provides comments on the writing that students produced in response. The comments are based on an analysis of a statistically significant random sample of students' responses.

The marking guide showing the criteria and standards used to grade responses is included here, together with graphs showing the distribution of grades awarded in each of the five substantive criteria and indicating the breakdown of student responses according to stimulus pieces selected and genres of responses. Finally, a selection of student responses has been included to exemplify successful writing as defined by the task criteria.

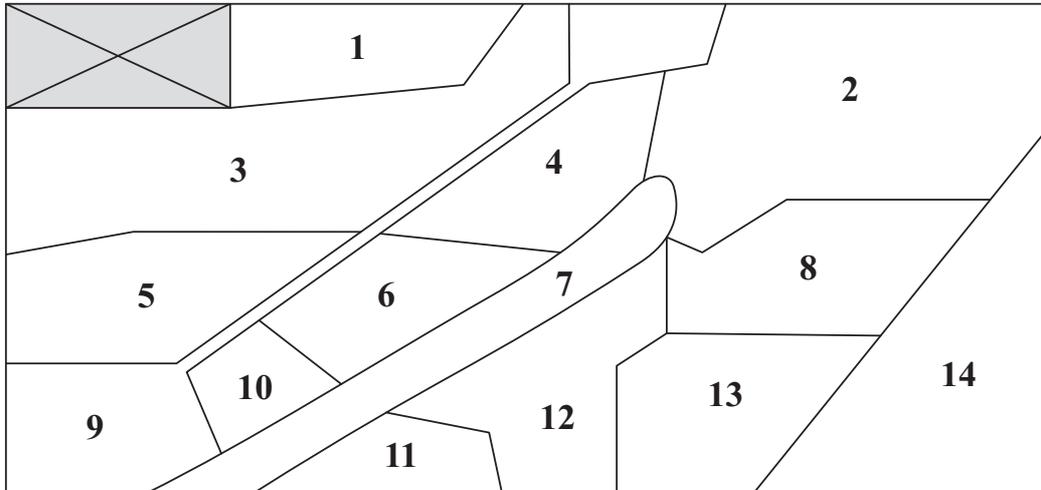
Overall concept: *Flight*

The overall concept linking the stimulus pieces on the 2010 testpaper was *Flight*. This concept was thought likely to engage young people, many of whom are considering their options for the future. The concept could represent their imminent departure from familiar things or their first journey from home. It could refer to the experience of launching themselves or their ideas into the unknown, of starting a new adventure or endeavour, or of escaping from some kind of control or threat. It could suggest the range of inventions, successful or completely impractical, that humans have devised to assist us to achieve the dream of flight.

Students interested in mathematics, physics and practical subjects may deal with the technical aspects of the concept. Some wrote about the design of flying machines and about the technology of aviation. Students more interested in the natural world wrote about the flight of birds or insects or about the power of the wind. Many focused on the aesthetic aspects of flight or described the beauty of flying creatures or of man-made creations in flight. Some explored the physical action and sensations involved in flying. Others wrote accounts or stories about someone leaving the security of home, making a start on a journey or beginning a new adventure.

Diagram of the testpaper

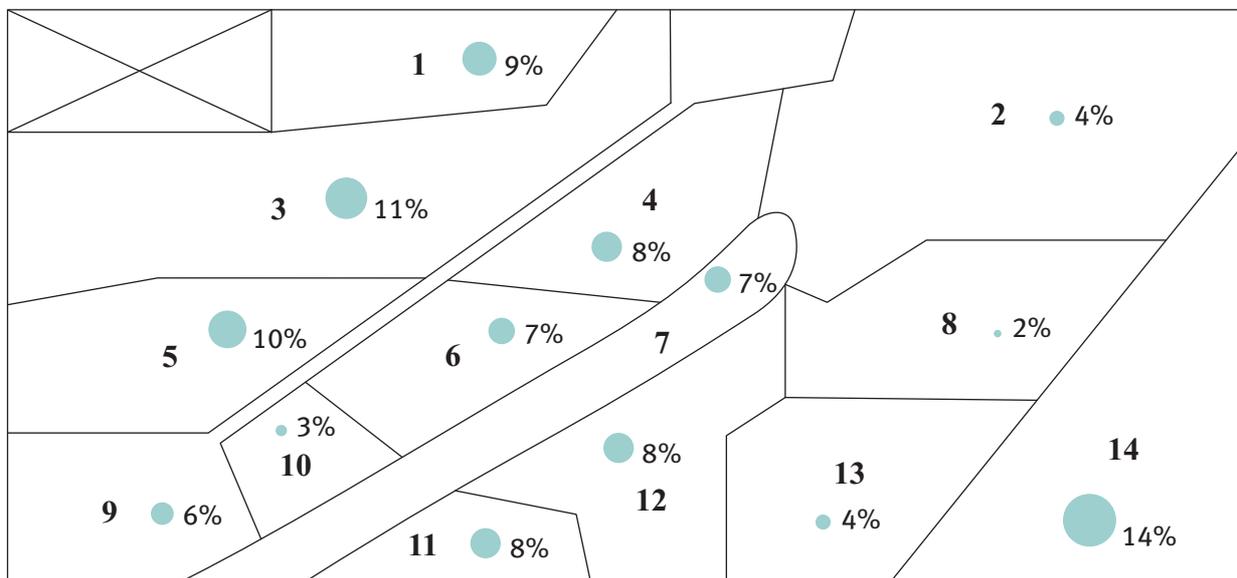
The diagram below represents the 2010 testpaper. The 14 stimulus pieces are numbered for reference. All pieces relate to the overall concept of the testpaper.



Stimulus pieces

Overview

The following diagram shows the percentage of students who indicated that they selected a particular stimulus piece (or pieces) as the starting point or prompt for their writing. In reality, most students used a combination of two or more stimulus pieces in developing a response to the concept, thus opening up a greater variety of possibilities for their writing than indicated here. For this reason, the percentages shown in this diagram add to more than 100%.



Indication of stimulus pieces as starting point or resource

Specific stimulus pieces and their response patterns

1. Socrates

Socrates' words reflect his belief in the potential of humans to reach new heights and in the power of the universe as a system. This inspired students to respond with discussions about human potential to achieve and the desire to understand the world. The image of the astronaut offered further opportunities to examine technological advances in space exploration, as well as providing the basis for stories set in the future.

2. Leaping

This piece refers to a form of street athletics called parkour. Many students used their background knowledge of this to write expository texts, however, it was not necessary to know the specifics of parkour to use the ideas from this piece. Accounts of a time where they felt like they were flying, ways in which we can use both mind and body to overcome obstacles as well as discussions about “what makes a superhero” (drawing specifically from the written text) all featured in student responses to this stimulus piece.

3. Taking off

One of the most popular stimulus pieces, this piece deals with plane flight, especially the stage of taking off. Many students wrote about experiences of plane travel, as well as about rising above the difficulties in their lives.

4. Eagle

This stimulus piece consisted of a simple written description of an eagle taking flight and an accompanying image. Prompted by this, students produced a wide variety of responses, ranging from factual reports on the physics of flight through to short stories about parent-eagles teaching their young to take their first flight.

5. Wings

The written text of this stimulus piece presented the view that, as a species, humans are disadvantaged by being “grounded”. The incongruity of the penguins — flightless birds — in the accompanying image was something that some students picked up on and incorporated into their writing, especially on a metaphorical level. This stimulus piece prompted many stories about scientific experiments that had resulted in the creation of human-bird hybrids, as well as expository and persuasive responses commenting on the social and environmental advantages and disadvantages of humans developing the ability to fly.

6. Snowboarder

The image of a lone snowboarder with the simple statement, “And then I was flying” was used by students both literally and conceptually. There were many short stories about trips to the snow and snowboarding competitions where comparisons were made with the action of flying.

7. Sayings

These well-known sayings and phrases could be used alone or in conjunction with other pieces. It was not necessary to incorporate all of these sayings into a response in order for it to be responsive to this stimulus piece. Indeed, responses usually suffered when too many sayings were used. The most successful responses wove the sayings into the writing, rather than writing to foreground the sayings that were being used. Many of the responses to this stimulus piece were short stories, where students used one or more of the sayings as the moral or message.

8. Flying carpet

This stimulus piece was the least popular of all pieces on the testpaper. The stanza from the poem “High Flight”, written by a young trainee pilot during WWII, captures some of the emotions aroused by flying. The familiar image of a flying carpet that accompanies the written text prompted students to write accounts of flying adventures, descriptions of flight with the kind of wonder and exultation that originally gave rise to the writing of the poem and procedural texts outlining the steps for creating magical flying carpets.

9. Kite

The image of the child with a kite and the description of the kite aloft should have brought back memories for many students of flying a kite or watching kites. The accompanying text would likely have resulted in students considering their personal hopes for the future and the possible challenges to be faced as they leave school and home. Many reflective and imaginative pieces were written in response to this stimulus piece, particularly with a focus on parent-child bonding, including responses written from the parent’s perspective as they outlined their hopes — and fears — for their child’s future.

10. Skydivers

The image of skydivers floating from an aircraft should have allowed students to imagine such an event and to describe the physical and emotional effects of leaving an aircraft in free fall, then floating down with the assistance of a parachute. Some students interpreted the image very literally and used the image of the out-of-formation skydiver as the basis of “disaster” stories and feature articles not only about the dangers but also about the appeal of skydiving and other extreme sports. Most students who responded to this stimulus piece, which was one of the least popular, used it in conjunction with other pieces on the testpaper.

11. Fight-or-flight

This written text provides a very short explanation of the fight-or-flight response to stressful situations. Students could have experienced any number of past situations of danger or stress in which they reacted in either of these ways. This notion gave rise to personal accounts, expository discussions of the phenomenon as well as narrative pieces with wide-ranging situations prompting a fight-or-flight response.

12. Wind

The balloons in this piece could suggest accounts or stories of journeys or flights in which the wind is important. The text, from an air force advertisement, suggests that there is no limit to where the wind can take us. In response, many students used this idea metaphorically to explore the notion of whether there are limits to possible success, often using the medium of a motivational or persuasive speech.

13. Books and movies

The text, referring to the game of Quidditch as described in the *Harry Potter* series, should have suggested books or movies that have been exciting, uplifting or memorable to students. Students choosing this stimulus piece wrote critiques or reviews of texts (not necessarily *Harry Potter*), personal reflections about times when their imagination took flight during or after the reading or viewing of a powerful text and expositions about the power of literature to inspire and transform lives.

14. Conquest

The variety of material here would have enabled students to consider a range of different approaches to this stimulus. Perhaps as a result, this was the most popular of all stimulus pieces on the testpaper. Many students wrote expository and persuasive pieces commenting on the effects of the aviation industry on today’s world. A further reason for the popularity of this piece was likely to have been the ease with which students were able to connect the ideas presented here with those of other stimulus pieces, particularly stimulus piece five.

Stimulus pieces: visual, written or combination?

In 2010, it was decided to examine more closely the use students made of the stimulus material on the testpaper. Students have the option of responding to the visual images, the written texts, or a combination of both. Stimulus pieces for the Writing Task are selected to maximise appeal for the wide cross-section of the Year 12 population. The material chosen is designed to excite students and prompt ideas for writing. When considering what to write and selecting a stimulus piece (or pieces), students should feel reassured that, by the time they reach Year 12, they have a considerable wealth of personal and subject-based knowledge and experience that they should not overlook.

From the sample scripts, it was apparent that 39% of students drew their ideas from the written text on the testpaper, while 38% chose to respond to a combination of written and visual stimulus material. Of the remaining students, 22% chose to respond to the visual images, while for the remaining 1% of students, it was difficult to determine due to their lack of responsiveness. Of the scripts that were identified as responding to both visual and written texts, almost two-thirds of students indicated that they had responded to more than one stimulus piece, thereby also drawing ideas from a wider variety of pieces.

When students draw their inspiration from the written pieces of text, there can be a danger in quoting large portions of text directly. This notably impacted on judgments on Length (words from the stimulus pieces are not counted) and Central idea (the ideas being presented are not the student's own). Direct quoting can also detract from a response when the language style of the quoted material differs from that of the student, and when quotations are used out of context or incorrectly (affecting Structuring & sequencing, Vocabulary, and Grammar, punctuation, spelling).

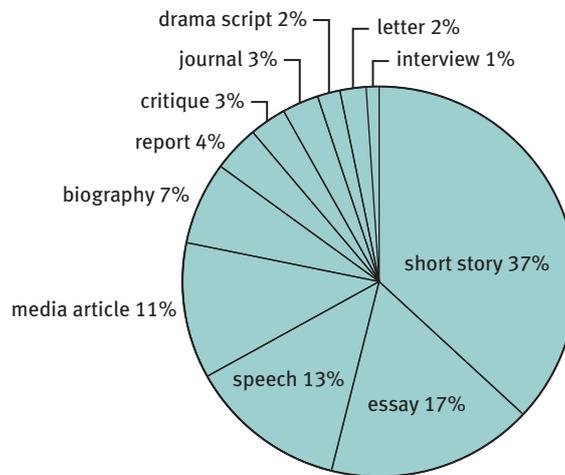
Choice of text type

In 2010, the most popular response was the *imaginative*, with 37% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by *expository pieces*, written by 32% of students. *Reflective* responses accounted for 20% of scripts and 11% of responses were *persuasive*. When determining which text type to employ, students need to consider the ultimate purpose of their writing. Do they wish to entertain their audience (imaginative)? Do they want to convey information (expository)? Would they like to recall, contemplate or share experiences (reflective)? Is it their intent to convince their audience of a particular viewpoint (persuasive)? Understanding this can help students to plan effectively and give focus to their writing.

Within these broader categories, students need to make decisions about the specific genre in which they wish to write and to keep in mind (as they plan their response) that some genres, for example, the speech, can have a variety of purposes, such as expositional or persuasive.

Choice of genre

Students may write in whatever genre they wish, with the exception of poetry. This enables them to draw on their knowledge and strengths, and to match their ideas from the stimulus with a suitable style of response. Eleven clear categories were identified.

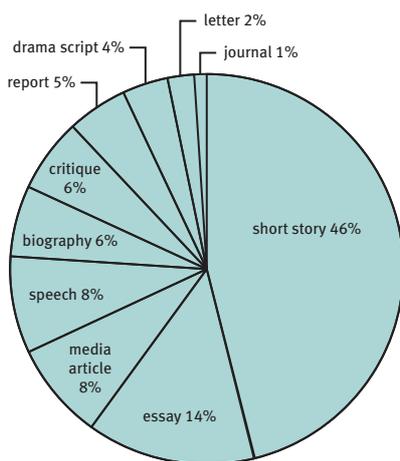


Popularity of genre: total sample

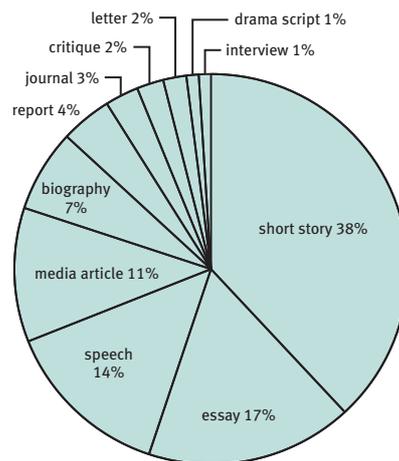
In 2010, the most popular genre — by a considerable margin — was the short story. This was followed by the essay, the speech and the media article. Least popular this year were the interview, the letter and the drama script. It is worthwhile noting that, while genre conventions are not assessed specifically (although they may affect Structuring & sequencing), students should aim to make use of, and indeed exploit, these conventions for effect. This certainly supports the recommendation that students write “what they know” — giving their writing authority and authenticity.

Student achievement and genre

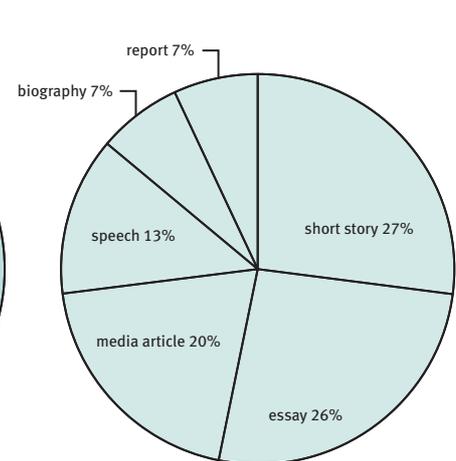
The diagrams below indicate the genres used in higher, middle and lower achieving responses. Note that the percentages shown are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100%.



higher achieving responses



middle achieving responses



lower achieving responses

Short story — The short story was the most popular genre by a significant margin. Not surprisingly, stories covered a wide variety of topics. Mid-air disasters, war stories involving fighter pilots, science-fiction experiments gone wrong, children growing up and beginning a new stage of life, overcoming the grief of losing a loved one and journeys of self-discovery are just some examples. In 2010, the most successful short stories were those that drew on students' own knowledge and experiences and made effective, yet economical, language choices such as varied sentence length and use of description (including metaphor and personification). Also, successful stories tended to be written with a goal in mind from the outset — that is, there was an effective establishment and development of ideas, a resolution and a conclusion.

Students should be wary of some strategies that are likely to have a negative impact on achievement. An example is the story that ends with the narrator waking to find it was all a dream. This can impact significantly on Central idea and Structuring & sequencing as many of these stories indicated a lack of planning and, consequently, a lack of direction. Other common problems (perhaps due to the number of stories that ended in planes crashing) were inconsistencies and inaccuracies in using tense and narrative perspective. This was especially noted in stories written in the first person (and often past tense) where the narrator wrote about the events leading up to their own death.

Essay — A very popular form of writing in 2010, the essay was chosen by students in all ability levels. This is perhaps because essay writing lends itself to a range of different topics, is a writing style that students encounter across the majority of subject areas and has elements that are similar to several other genres. The most successful of these responses were very clearly focused on purpose and audience and developed a clear thesis. Essays that were well written followed a clear structure, consisting of an introduction (including a thesis statement), the body of writing containing development and explanation of main points, and a concluding paragraph which presented a summary.

Speech — The speech was a popular genre and the purpose of speeches ranged from persuasive to informative to motivational. Having a clear understanding of the purpose and audience of the speech is crucial for success. Also, students need to ensure that their topic is suitable for this genre, that is, a topic that is not contrived and that would interest the audience.

Media article — Consisting of texts such as feature articles, editorials and journal articles, this genre was quite popular with students. Predominantly expository in nature, media articles require students to have reasonable knowledge of their topic. Therefore, students should carefully consider their own background knowledge and expertise when selecting this approach to responding to their chosen stimulus piece(s).

Biography — Biographical writing included specific texts such as memoirs, personal reflections and obituaries. This was a reasonably popular type of response in 2010, with students often writing as “characters” reflecting on their experiences of flight and flying. The most successful scripts focused on a specific event or recollection rather than on a broad range of information or topics.

Report — A small percentage of students chose to write a report. Many of these reports were scientific in nature, perhaps suggesting that students are aware of the genres best suited to their knowledge and experience. As previously stated, while conventions of genre are not assessed specifically, reports should make use of features such as subheadings as well as sections including, for example, objectives, conclusions and recommendations to add to the authenticity of the writing and, consequently, the authority of the writer.

Critique — While this was not a very popular form of writing, many of the students who wrote in this genre chose to write reviews — usually prompted by stimulus piece 13 — about books or films that have had an impact on their lives. Another trend noted was students offering a comment about the positive and/or negative effect of technological advances on humanity.

Journal — Journal writing included texts such as a diary entry or a flight log and were usually reflective in style. This genre is often problematic for students because writing “as themselves” may limit opportunities for selecting and demonstrating a wide or discriminating vocabulary. Also, they tend to lose focus as they are writing, which can affect Structuring & sequencing.

Drama script — Despite there being only a small percentage this year, the majority of drama scripts were among the higher achieving responses. It is possible to infer from this that students who wrote in this form had background knowledge about the specific conventions of the genre, and were able to utilise these to effect. Conversely, the lower achieving responses commonly fell short of length requirements; this impacts across the other criteria.

Letter — As with journal writing, letters can often provide challenges in Vocabulary and Structuring & sequencing. To be successful, students should ensure that the purpose and, consequently, the content of the letter is substantive enough to justify the choice of genre and also meet length requirements. In 2010 there was a noticeable absence of letters being written by students who produced lower achieving responses. This is perhaps an indication that these students recognised the difficulty of writing letters successfully.

Interview — Interview was the least popular identified genre, with the smallest percentage of students choosing to write this type of response. For a number of these scripts, Central idea was the criterion that contributed least to overall achievement, perhaps suggesting that students need to have a clear understanding of exactly what it is they want their interview to convey, and how to develop this throughout the response.

Criteria and standards

The most successful responses are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 80). The criteria are Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); and Structuring & sequencing (SS) plus Length (L).

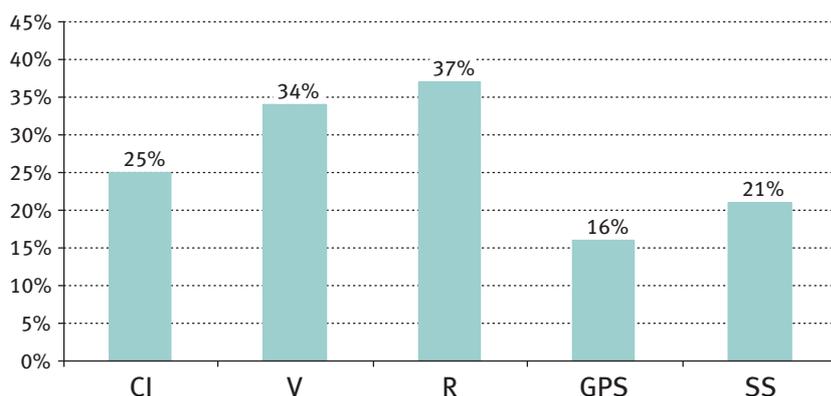
Each response is marked by three markers. Each marker assigns either four criteria-based standards or three criteria-based standards plus a judgment about Length. Different combinations of judgments are required of the three primary markers (referee marking occurs as required). Markers consider the contribution of each of the criteria they are marking to the holistic worth of the response. On the marksheet they record each of these as a standard (from 1 to 6) with a qualifier (+, 0, -) for each standard and, if required, make a decision about the length of the response.

The following table shows the percentage of students who achieved the various standards for each of the criteria (for a breakdown of the distribution of raw scores for each criteria, refer to the graphs on page 81).

Criterion	higher achieving		middle achieving		lower achieving	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
CI	0.7	13.6	51.6	30.7	3.2	0.3
V	0.5	12	65.9	19.9	1.6	0.2
R	0.7	12.5	54.5	28.4	3.6	0.3
GPS	0.4	10	53.1	32.1	4	0.4
SS	0.5	10.6	50.7	34	3.8	0.3

For the responses sampled, the data from the standards awarded were analysed, first for the total sample and then for each of the higher achieving, middle achieving and lower achieving samples. The diagram below shows, for each criterion, the percentage of responses for which that criterion represented the highest achievement, that is, the criterion on which students did best. Because many students are awarded identical grades across several criteria, the percentages shown in the graph add to more than 100%.

Best performing criteria: total sample



For the total sample, Responsiveness was the criterion in which the greatest percentage of responses (37%) demonstrated highest achievement. Grammar, punctuation, spelling and Structure and sequencing were the two criteria in which students were least successful. This applied whether the overall quality of the responses was higher, middle or lower achieving. This phenomenon was also observed in 2009.

Students who wrote responses that were lower or middle achieving did best on Responsiveness and Vocabulary. For the higher achieving responses, Central idea was the most successful criterion, followed by Responsiveness.

Achievement in specific criteria

Central idea

When assessing this criterion, markers are essentially asking: what is the response about. That is, what is the key idea behind the piece of writing, and then, how well has the student deliberately and clearly developed this idea? The most successful scripts will demonstrate direction — whether explicit or implicit — and resolution. Scripts suffer in this criterion when the central idea is unevenly developed or where there are several, usually vague, ideas present. A lack of resolution often results from lack of direction and consequently has a negative impact on this criterion.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Central idea was the best criterion for 37% of students who produced higher achieving scripts, better than all other criteria. This emphasises for students the importance of having a carefully and deliberately formulated idea and plan.

Vocabulary

Many people believe that “the bigger the word, the better”. In this criterion however, this is not necessarily the case. Success in Vocabulary is determined by word choices: words that have been deliberately selected for effect and exactly fit their location within the text. While students should aim to demonstrate a command and range of vocabulary, their control of language is also crucial. Incorrect and/or inappropriate word choice, lack of variety and language that gets in the way of meaning will all influence a student’s success in this criterion.

Making use of language devices such as metaphor and personification, as well as using “technical” language suited to the context, proved to be very effective for many students. Less effective was the often jarring use of exaggeration and hyperbole, tautology and sweeping generalisations. Maintaining an awareness of the purpose and audience of the writing is essential for success in this criterion.

Responsiveness

The piece of writing that a student produces for the Writing Task must clearly be a response to the testpaper on the day, showing connectedness to both the concept AND stimulus piece(s). Therefore, Responsiveness is weighted most heavily of all criteria. The highest achieving scripts in this criterion will exhibit strong and sustained connectedness to both. Achievement will suffer where connectedness shows weaknesses, or where students respond to either the concept or stimulus, but not to both. It is important to be aware that simply repeating the concept word, for example “flight”, several times is not demonstrating connectedness. Evidence also suggests that responding to too many stimulus pieces (referred to as “touring the testpaper”) reduces a student’s likelihood of achieving well in this criterion. This is largely because these scripts tend to make only passing or glancing reference to the concept or stimulus.

Across the entire sample, Responsiveness was the most successful criterion for the largest percentage of students (37%). There was a marked increase from 2009 in the number of students who were most successful in this criterion, perhaps an indication of increasing testwiseness: that the students of 2010 had greater awareness of the necessity to connect their writing to both the concept and stimulus of the paper and, consequently, produced responses that were successful in doing so.

Grammar, punctuation, spelling

Within this criterion, Grammar is deemed more important than Punctuation which, in turn, is more important than Spelling. This is because each one of these can affect meaning more than the next if not done well. To achieve a high standard, students must consistently demonstrate precise and effective use, with few (if any) errors. This includes exploiting the conventions of writing for specific purposes and effects. Student performance on this criterion will be affected by the degree to which errors detract from meaning.

For the entire sample, regardless of achievement level, this is the criterion in which students performed most poorly. Some of the most frequent problems evident in responses were

- inconsistencies with tense
- the omission or incorrect use of punctuation, for example failing to end questions with question marks
- the absence of apostrophes to identify possession, and

- antecedent agreement (particularly with singular, plural and indefinite pronouns).

Some problems are more identifiable by achievement level. Rhetorical questions tended to be used to great effect by more successful writers, whereas less successful writers overused them. More successful writers were more likely to use varied sentence length and to use punctuation to create a particular effect (such as rising tension). Less successful writers wrote overly long sentences packed with too much (often irrelevant) detail and description.

Structuring & sequencing

This criterion requires markers to consider the architecture of the piece, that is, the way in which the ideas in the response are arranged. To be successful, the writing must demonstrate controlled structuring and deliberate sequencing of ideas. The writing needs to be fluent, logical and flexible. Achievement is hampered where there are weaknesses evident, such as gaps in logic, poor paragraphing and/or randomness in the arrangement of ideas.

Some of the problems with Structuring & sequencing arose when students didn't clearly establish the context of their writing and, consequently, the development of ideas was less sequential. Also, poor proofreading and editing can have a negative impact on writing, particularly where students include information that is superfluous to the purpose, therefore weakening the response. In short stories, this often results from including too much unnecessary description. Of course, one thing that students can do to contribute to a well-structured response is to formulate a clear planning strategy that is best suited to their individual writing abilities.

Length

The Writing Task subtest requires students to produce a piece of continuous prose approximately 600 words in length. Penalties are applied for short, far too short, long, and far too long responses. While each of the criteria is considered and assessed independently, Length has the potential to have the greatest impact on achievement in other criteria. For example, Structuring & sequencing was the lowest performing criterion for approximately 50% of sample scripts judged either far too short or far too long. In terms of overall performance, those scripts that are far too short are the most likely to be amongst the lowest achieving scripts.

Overall achievement

The table below shows the percentages of students who achieved the various standards overall.

Grade					
1	2	3	4	5	6
0.1	7.7	56.4	33.5	2.1	0.2

2010

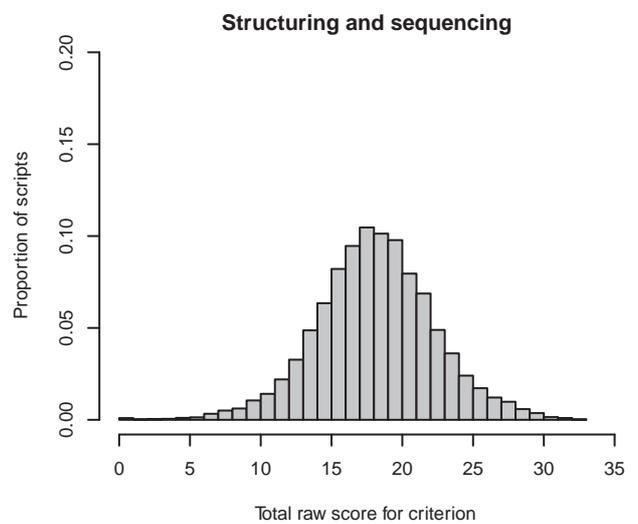
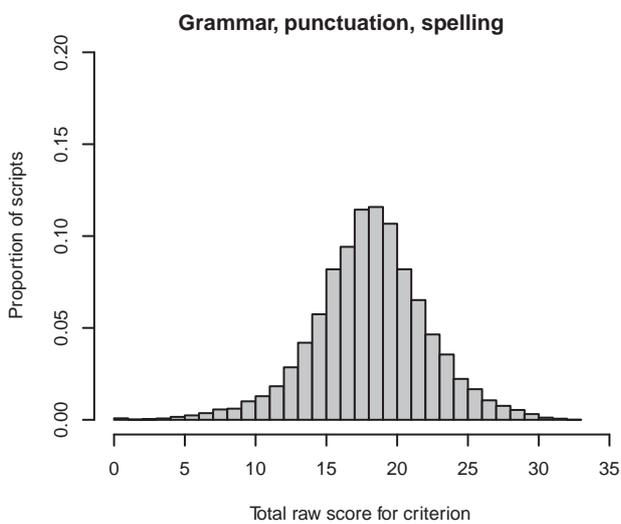
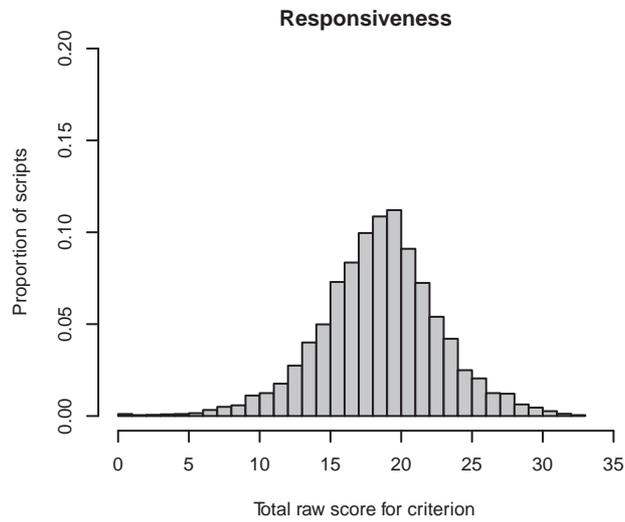
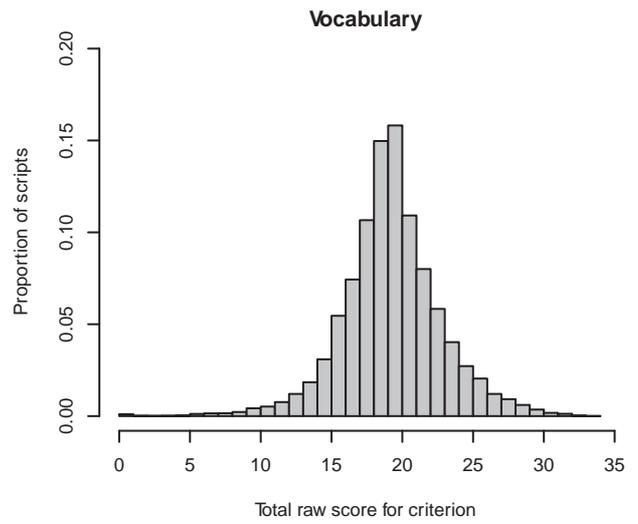
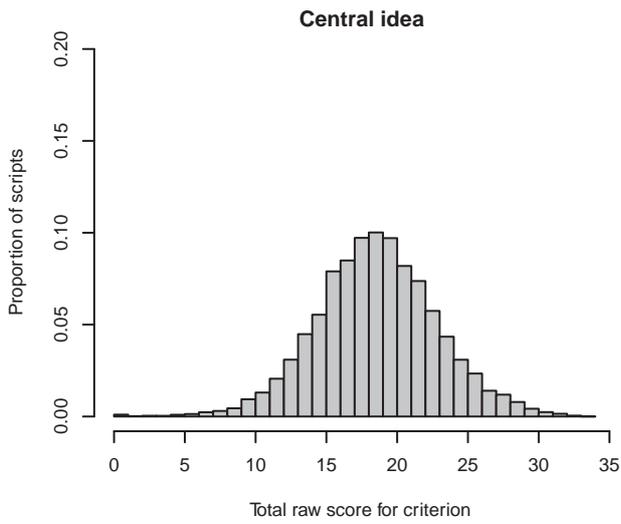
Grading a script

- 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.

**Writing Task marking guide:
Criteria and standards**

Contribution to the holistic grade made by ...						Decision about ...
CENTRAL IDEA	VOCABULARY	RESPONSIVENESS	GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING	STRUCTURING & SEQUENCING	LENGTH	
<p>For a 1 + the writing demonstrates the deliberate, focused development of a clear central idea (explicit or implicit).</p>	<p>For a 1 + the writing demonstrates the use of words selected for their effect and exactly fitted to their location (the right words in the right places).</p>	<p>For a 1 + the writing demonstrates sensitivities to nuances of the concept and stimulus material.</p>	<p>For a 1 + the writing consistently demonstrates a command of: • the conventions of writing (subject/verb agreement, participle use, antecedent agreement, pronoun choice, tense, etc.) • correct punctuation • correct spelling.</p>	<p>For a 1 + the writing demonstrates coherence and cohesion through: • controlled structuring; and • deliberate sequencing of ideas and images.</p>	<p>about right 500–750 words</p>	
<p>identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed</p> <p>identifiable but unevenly developed</p> <p>identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</p> <p>not identifiable</p>	<p>1 controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 appropriate</p> <p>4 inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 limited</p>	<p>1 strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 connectedness to the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>4 connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; or weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material</p>	<p>1 precise and effective use</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning</p> <p>4 lapses obtrude and detract from meaning</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 inept</p>	<p>1 fluent, logical and flexible</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 weaknesses are evident</p> <p>4 weaknesses detract</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 incoherent</p>	<p>too long 750–1000 words</p> <p>too short 400–500 words</p> <p>far too long > 1000 words</p> <p>far too short < 400 words</p>	1
						2
						3
						4
						5
						6

Distribution of raw grades in each criterion



Selected student responses

The responses to the 2010 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

The Kite is an account of a girl's visit to her grandfather's home after his death. She is there to clean the old house and wanders through it, reminiscing, describing familiar smells and objects and noting the unfamiliar silence. When she enters the shed she finds her grandfather's old red kite. In the process of launching, flying and finally releasing the kite, she recalls his words about kite flying and reflects on his philosophy of life.

This deceptively simple response uses sensitive selection and sequencing of evocative images and effective vocabulary to establish and develop a clear central idea which is only completely revealed at the end of the piece.

Response 2

The Plight and Flight of Wizards is an exposition that explains that the overriding reason for the phenomenal success of J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels is their focus on flight. We are told how the author gave Harry certain powers, among them the ability to fly. Harry discovers that he has a talent for Quidditch, a sport that requires the players to fly on broomsticks. Possible reasons for the human fascination with flight are explored and this is identified as the key to the popularity of the novels.

The writer of this response has clearly responded both to the overall concept of the testpaper and to aspects of the stimulus pieces by taking ideas from the stimulus material and developing them to create a well-structured, cohesive and convincing discussion.

Response 3

The King of the Skies is a descriptive piece in which the writer recalls a bird-watching experience from long ago. The focus of attention was an eagle, nesting and caring for her chick. The watcher observed the mother over time as she hunted for prey and fed her offspring. Finally, the chick reached adulthood and left the nest, and his mother. His flight signified his entry into the "kingdom of the sky".

The drama of the birds' lives is captured in an account that employs precise and discriminating vocabulary and a simple but effective structure to convey the beauty and majesty of these creatures.

Response 4

The Fairy Who Couldn't Fly is a children's story about a fairy who lives with her mother in a pepper pot. She has been teased since childhood by other fairies because she is unable to fly. One day, the wind fairy brings a bottle containing a magic potion to her. When she drinks this, she is thrilled by a newly discovered ability to fly. The fairies who had previously mocked her are amazed. When she returns from her first flight, she discovers that the wind fairy has disappeared and that she will now take the wind fairy's place.

This response shows sophistication in the selection of images, effective use of vocabulary and a clear command of the conventions of language.

The kite

She opened the front door to the old weatherboard house. She recognised the smell first. Old tobacco mingled with wood polish and toast. Even when there was no toast cooking, the smell still ~~engross~~ lingered in the wood panelled hallway. Not surprising, she considered, as toast was really all her ~~of~~ grandfather ate. As she stepped over the threshold she was struck by a wave of familiarity. Everything was as she remembered it; the boot scrubber by the door, the ashtray beside the sofa, the ~~the~~ biscuit jar on the kitchen counter. The ~~the~~ photographs were lined up on the mantle as they had always been, stulls of Christmasses, Easters and birthdays gone by. She had, never before realised, that the photographs spanned such a long period of time. Wrinkles appeared on once smooth faces, gap toothed grins became orthodontically perfected smiles, fashions came and went. What unnerved her the ~~most~~ most, however, was the absence of sound. The record player lay unused in the corner, a thin film of dust lay over the deck. She had grown accustomed to Patsy Cline's crooning as her grandfather tinkered away on his latest project, his off key humming accompanying her honeyed tones.

It had been a week since the funeral however, and she had been sent here by her mother

to clean rather than reminisce. She decided to begin with the shed, as it was the biggest job. Making her way towards the old wooden structure she tried to picture its contents in her mind. The ~~big~~ door ~~was~~ handle felt heavy in her hands as she pulled it open. Slowly she wandered inside, and there it was, hanging above the workbench, ~~was~~ the old red kite.

Her grandfather loved kites. He loved making them, flying them, boring his grandchildren talking about them. She was the only one who shared his enthusiasm though, and it was this which made her his favourite, so she liked to think anyway. She reached up and felt its wooden crossbar, the red fabric ~~was~~ across it. ~~Her grandfather~~ Her grandfather always said that flying a kite was a lesson in control. For even though you were holding on, steering it along, its path was determined by the wind. Ultimately it was this external force, over which you had no power, ~~was~~ that held the fate of the kite in its invisible hands. He said it was the closest thing to flying one could experience with both feet on the ground, as the force of the wind travelled down the string, through your arms and into your core. The biggest mistake, he oft repeated, was to try and fight ~~at~~ the wind, instead of allowing yourself to fly with it. She could see that when he flew the kite, his ~~own~~ mind ~~was~~ became

the wood and fabric, ducking and weaving in the endless expanse of blue; higher, further, free from limitations. ~~She wondered when the kite~~ She tried to remember the last time she had flown a kite. She had been so busy with university that she hadn't ~~even~~ seen her grandfather in over six months, let alone fly a kite. ~~The weight of~~ the lightness of the materials ^{and} the perfectly balanced composition of the kite made the red one her granddad's favourite. She picked ~~up the kite~~ it up and made her way outside, the cool breeze dancing on her skin. ~~Even though it had been quite sensitive since she had~~ Unravelling the ~~rest~~ string she began to run, launching the kite in the air. It flew, climbing higher, becoming a red beacon in the sea of blue, her hands ~~being~~ ~~the~~ the anchor. She worked with the wind, allowing it to guide her arms and the direction of the ~~kite~~ kite. She remembered about the freedom and limitless possibilities that her grandfather often spoke about. So she let go. As she ~~watched~~ watched the red speck grow smaller and smaller, she let both their paths ~~be~~ be determined by the wind.

The Plight and Flight of Wizards

When Londoner Joanne Kathleen Rowling reclined in an armchair by the window of a city cafe on a dreary day, pen and paper in hand, she unknowingly brought the minds of millions back to life. Using ink and a slip of parchment, Ms. Rowling gave the world Harry Potter, and in doing so, blessed him with skills of which we mere muggles know not. On this day, she gave Harry the levitation spells - wingardium leviosa and levicorpus¹; she also wrote a Hippogriff¹ into Harry's life, along with an Axminster flying carpet (to seat twelve), a Nimbus 2000 broomstick, and the crème de la crème of the Quidditch world - a Firebolt. As her now-famous novel developed, and the boy Harry Potter evolved from a child with strange abilities to a talented wizard fighting the ever-elusive 'He Who Must Not Be Named', J.K. Rowling discovered she had given her character a power that every mortal seeks; Joanne Rowling had gifted Harry with flight.

We first meet our hero when he is merely a boy living in the cupboard under the stairs. As Harry journey's closer to his destiny, he unwittingly discovers a burgeoning talent for the sport of broomsticks - Quidditch. Harry's broomstick plays an integral role in his adventures, helping him capture a winged key in his first year, meet a gaggle of Dementors² in his third, and escape Amortia - the cursed fire - in the final installment of J.K.'s literary masterpiece. His broomstick is inevitably the wind on which Harry soars through his years at Hogwarts School, and into the hearts and minds of so many. Had Ms. Rowling not crafted a bewitched broom on which her lead character could fly,

¹ Hippogriff - winged creature, invisible to those who have not seen death.
² Dementors - evil entities, which suck happiness out of the air.

the Harry Potter series would most likely not be the smashing success it is today.

Yet one does wonder, what is it about the notion of flight - a game of Quidditch and the Golden Snitch³ - which captivates and enchants us, leading our minds into the realm of boundless possibility? One may rule out the action of flying itself, for as the human race has developed, so too has our ability to think up evermore imaginative means of reaching the stars. The golden thread which links our world and the enchanted lands of Harry Potter, could be the feeling of infinity and impossibility that magical folk and muggles alike seek. In the sky, whether on a broomstick, aeroplane, hot-air balloon, or on the feathered wings of a Hippogriff, one has no tangible connection to the Earth. A new world is opened up, one in which there is a sense that dreams of lands undiscovered and tales untold may blossom into reality. When Harry feels the rush of wind against his face, he discovers a sense of belonging and of joy, which saves our hero when he is faced with everything from the deliciously tricky 'Devil's Snare' to the rancid kiss of the Dementors.

For centuries, children have wished and dreamed to fly through the clouds, to reach into places where reality is re-defined. The fun and frippery of soaring through the sky in a Ford Anglia - as Harry and Ron do in their second year at Hogwarts - is a dream which has captivated all those who ever wished to escape the conformity and reality of our earthly world, and immerse their soul in places where the impossible can be realised, and magic exists. This is the key notion which attracts so many to the tales of Harry and his friends. J.K. Rowling

³-Golden Snitch - a ball which flies & must be captured in Quidditch.

has told the story of a beloved hero who finds hope, joy and magic amongst the clouds, thus planting the seed in the minds of muggles, that an enchanted world may be realised, if only they can break away from the normalcies of Earth, fetch a broomstick from Diagon Alley⁴, and fly.

⁴ Diagon Alley - A place which only magical folk can visit.

The King of the Skies

I can recall, even all these years later, that day I stood on the sheltered beach surrounded by trees and saw her for the first time. I was just about to replace my binoculars in their holster when I discerned the cry, the "caw" of the baby.

The binoculars were raised to my eyes once more. I adjusted their focus with a surgeon's precision, then relocated her abode, now also the home of a young one.

She sat proudly atop her wavering, leafy crotle, guarding her pink and naked offspring. Though it was a windy day at the beach she did not teeter, and the minute chick took his cue from her. The eagles were breathtaking.

So began my love affair with this proud mother and her noisy child. I soon learned her idiosyncracies, like the way her coal-coloured feathers would be ablaze with copper fire when her back caught the sun. Her exultant cry when she plummeted down onto her prey. I learnt also that she had been tagged many years before, and now wore her details clipped onto her ankle like a human war veteran. I should have been outraged by mankind's interference with this queen of the skies, but she paid it no heed. I soon adopted her attitude.

Over the months of keen observance, I watched her child quicken, too. The delicate, membranous skin soon toughened and sprouted the downy fluff of a child. He had none of his mother's dignity yet, but I saw in the incline of his head and glint of his eyes that one day he would.

As his mother brought more sustenance for her ward, adult feathers speared through his dense, fickle fuzz. I have always likened this stage to human adolescence, with its outbreaks of pimples and awkward, not-quite-adult bodies. In that time he began to salute the sun with her each morning, but he was not ready to take flight yet.

But then there came a day when he was. The sky was the intense blue of a Romanticist's landscape, smeared with wispy clouds high in the atmosphere. Waves broke only gently and barely a breeze disturbed the greenish water. The coarse sand crunched under my boots as I made my way to my usual vantage point.

I saw the young one in his fresh adult feathers, perched in his nest with beak in the air. An eagle's beak is analogous to a person's Roman nose - protuberant, distinguished and hooked. What we humans lack, however, is the fierce countenance and bunched, muscular shoulders of this young bird and his mother. Almost too casually this queen of the ether took wing, cawing in the high-pitched way eagles have for her offspring to join her.

I followed her through the sky and then directed the binoculars back to the young one. I watched in excruciating anxiety for his next move. The blood roaring in my ears provided a dashing crescendo for the pivotal moment. He flexed, feeling the delicious movement of bulging muscle where once there had been only fragile newborn sinew. He must have been bigger than the queen by half, an attribute only exaggerated by his outstretched wingspan.

He inched onto the edge of his bed of sticks, flapping. Then, by some unknown mechanism of time, he judged when to launch. In just two beats of his glorious chocolate-brown wings he was away, into his kingdom.

I never saw the newly-crowned king of the sky again, but I will always remember.

"The Fairy Who Couldn't Fly"

They lived in cookie jars and honey pots, played catch with sugar cubes, and bathed in milk and rosewater. Their lives were frivolous and filled with fun, for they were not bound by duties or other limits. The other fairies were free to frolic as they pleased, right under the noses of the unsuspecting humans: the strident men, flustered housewives and naive children. They were not disabled like I was... Not only was I unable to fly, I was paralyzed by my envy.

Since I was young, they teased me - provoking me until I'd weep. I was known as "the fairy who couldn't fly", and at times I was likened to Ruddy the red nosed reindeer, (although I had never been given a special duty as a result of my difference). I didn't attend fairy school, or play sports because they wouldn't include me; instead, I spent my days at home in a state of inertia as I watched the others dance in mockery.

One dewy morning, as I sat by the window on the sill beside the plant pot, I gazed at the orange leaves falling gracefully from the trees. I felt jealousy whilst they fluttered to the ground; I was consumed by my emptiness and helplessness. My mother had left for work early that day - as the pumpkin fairy, she had to sow double the seeds in Autumn. Before she flew off, she kissed my forehead and smiled. Mother's impish smile remained an image on the banks of my eyelids that day; the magical curve of her voluptuous lips was present every time I blinked.

"I'm home, sweet pea!" she called as she fluttered through the opening hole to our pepper pot abode. "I have a surprise for you..." I skipped towards her voice to find her standing with another fairy. In an instant, my face lit up as I recognised the second character. She was the wind fairy.

"Hello poppet," she beamed. "I see there is no need for me to introduce myself..." I shook my head playfully. The wind fairy had golden hair that shimmered in the afternoon sun. Her emerald eyes were warm and bright, and her crimson lips contrasted against her porcelain complexion. "I have a present for you."

I smiled and hopped a little closer. "Are you going to teach me how to fly?" I asked, becoming rather excited. I could feel the beating of my delicate heart behind my ribs.

Without uttering another word, the fairy pursed her lips and reached into the pocket of her dress. She presented a blue bottle, which was dotted with sequins. Inside, I observed a crystal liquid that swirled like a trapped tornado. I knew immediately that it wasn't a flying elixer, for if such a thing had existed, I surely would have tried it by now. Whilst my heart sank in slight disappointment, I remained intrigued. This time, it was my mother who spoke.

"This, Micia, is a very potent concoction." The words leaving her mouth were shrill and serious. "You will use it sparingly, and with great caution... Do I make myself understood?" I nodded. A dry lump was forming in my throat. It was hard, it didn't dissolve when I tried to swallow.

The wind fairy then proceeded to open the bottle, releasing the scents of cinnamon and nutmeg into the air. The stench of pepper from our home was soon overcome by the sweet smell of the potion. I stepped forward cautiously, curious to taste the mixture.

I pressed my lips against the bottle's mouth, took a sip and inhaled! I closed my eyes. What happened next was a blur. Before I knew it, my wings tingled and I felt as light as a feather. I took a dive off the top of the pepper pot and began to float. In a state of awe and amazement, I climbed higher than the book shelf, flew further than the study down the hall and travelled faster than I ever thought possible.

As I passed the cookie jars and honey pots, the spice racks and the utensil drawers, I observed the disbelief on the faces of the other fairies, who were grounded by their shock. I beamed brilliantly as I experienced flight for the first time. I laughed, cried, lived, died and went to heaven in that moment.

The wind fairy had cured me - she had taken me higher and further than I had thought possible. My world was now complete, for I was not bound by limits...

When I finally returned home, there was my mother. Ever so proud, she embraced me. The wind fairy was nowhere to be found, though. Mother sighed as she told me that the potion exhausted the wind fairy's power. It was at that point I realised that I was still bound, but this time not by disability. I could fly, and now, I was the wind fairy. I was no longer inert.