Writing Task (WT)

Commentary
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 2011 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 student 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.

WT 2011 Overall concept: Gold
The overall concept linking the 14 separate stimulus pieces on the 2011 testpaper is Gold. Perhaps no other substance has exerted such an influence on the history of nations and the world. Gold has been one of the world's most desired metals and has provided the motivation for exploration of newly discovered lands. Gold discoveries were significant in bringing immigrants to Australia and today, the exploitation of deposits is still significant to the economic development of the nation. Internationally, gold has been the basis of money in most economies.

The attributes that have made this metal so desirable and so powerful are simple. It is resistant to oxidation, it is malleable, it is unusually dense, and it fulfils two major roles in human affairs — to adorn and to exchange for what people need and want.

The word has strong metaphoric connections. Gold stands for quality, excellence and value. It can be a symbol of success and achievement and indicates one who is a winner. It suggests wealth and prosperity, power and prestige, religion and royalty.

The concept has a range of applications wide enough to interest and engage most students and to prompt responses that range from narratives, memoirs, biographies and reports, to those that are reflective, expository, argumentative and persuasive.
Diagram of the testpaper

The diagram below represents the 2011 testpaper. The 14 stimulus pieces are numbered for reference. All pieces relate to the overall concept of the testpaper.

Stimulus pieces

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%.
1 Locket
The photographs in the gold locket suggest past and present. The accompanying comment tells us that we need to look to the knowledge we have from the past if we want to gain the truth. It is then our responsibility to take any action that may be necessary. This stimulus piece prompted true or fictional accounts of past lives, in the form of memoir or biography, in responses that revealed significant events or truths that are ‘golden’, perhaps pointing out the actions that have resulted or should be taken. It also had a particular appeal for students with an interest in history who could apply the words, and possibly the illustration, to some historical figure, event, political movement or era.

2 Sun
The sun is a source of radiance that is indispensable to life on our planet. In some past civilisations it was the focus of worship. For students in parts of the state affected by floods and storms, the written text reminded them of the way they felt during that time. Some responded with accounts of their own or friends’ experiences. Others provided fictional accounts or stories of times when people have emerged from sadness to joy.

3 Golden age
Developments in technology, even in the lifetime of the students responding to this test paper, have been amazing. The future is unknown and exciting. It has the potential for a new golden age of technology but a golden age that may also have a dark side. Some responses speculated on what lies ahead, in expositions or in fiction. The writers were prompted to discuss the possible developments and their benefits, or explore concerns that have been raised about their impact. This stimulus piece elicited expositions and persuasive responses of various kinds.

4 Gold star
The gold star has commonly been used as a reward for children who succeed in a task at school. Most students would remember their pride and satisfaction on being awarded a gold star at some time during their childhood. For some, the experience may have been a turning point. Some students wrote about the significance of the reward being gold, and a star. Others related their story, reflected on the experience and even commented on long-term effects. Some students were prompted to write an interview with or media report about a significant person in various fields. Some discussed the importance of rewards.

5 Treasure chest
The written text in this stimulus piece provides information about the uses of gold as a metal, in past and present times. This gave students a range of starting points for responses that explored the significance of gold to society or to individuals. The visual image of the wooden treasure chest suggested ideas of wealth, riches and beautiful objects to some. A number of students wrote expositions or reflective pieces in which they discussed the enduring value of gold and the ways in which it has been and still is used. Alternatively, the ideas acted as prompts for imaginative pieces of all kinds dealing with adventure, crime, love and passion.

6 Books
This stimulus piece asked students to make judgments about the elements that make a book memorable and so, to explain the experience of rapt immersion in the imagined reality that is the world of a ‘good book’. Some related the questions to a range of books, while others preferred to focus on a single work. Some students focused on just one of the questions posed and applied it to just one or to a number of works. Although the questions relate mostly to fiction, some of them would apply equally well to non-fiction. This stimulus piece prompted students to communicate their enthusiasm for reading and to explore the ways in which the concept of gold can be applied to books.

7 Friendship
Students used this saying, alone or in combination with other stimulus pieces, to develop an exposition, a reflection or imaginative response on the theme of friendship. The statement gave them a prompt for a short story, a biographical account or a media article.
8 Hard-boiled egg

This stimulus piece provided a homily that students used alone or in combination with other stimulus pieces. Students explored the meaning of the advice in narratives, expositions or reflective responses and, in many cases, wove the idea through responses that dealt primarily with ideas from other stimulus pieces.

9 Eureka

The bronze statue of a miner throwing up his hands in triumph at finding gold provided ideas for accounts of exploration and discovery. The written text suggested to students that such excitement is not restricted to the discovery of gold but can apply to any area of human endeavour. There were accounts of scientific research and discovery with the knowledge that when we are successful we have ‘struck gold’. Response genres included expositions, reflections and imaginative responses.

10 Rainbow

Rainbows form when the sun shines on water droplets in falling rain, spray or mist. In our imagination they are associated with a legendary pot of gold or reward that might be found at the end. This stimulus piece suggests the human belief that good times will follow bad and that we must endure hardship in order to find the reward of wealth and happiness. The written text provides a reminder that the ultimate reward is not all that is important and that there are pleasures that we should value along the way. Students exploited the imagery and told stories of people emerging from hard times to find happiness or riches or of people who experienced joy and satisfaction even during hard times.

11 My Country

Dorothea Mackellar’s patriotic poem, *My Country*, known also as *Core of My Heart*, has a link with the Rainbow stimulus piece. The poem focuses on the changes caused by flood, fire and drought followed by the rejuvenation of the land. The accompanying image of our national floral emblem (the Golden Wattle) also aroused thoughts of gold. Students were able to respond to this stimulus piece with discussions, reflections and stories of country life, or expositions and persuasive responses dealing with rural issues and the challenges that face us in retaining what is of value, or golden, in our country.

12 Mona Lisa

Prevalent in the major works of Leonardo da Vinci is the golden ratio. This painting is an example of its application. The face is a perfect golden rectangle according to the ratio of the width of her forehead compared to the length from the top of her head to her chin. Students with an interest in art and design found this stimulus piece a source of ideas for their responses. They explained the golden ratio and its articulation in this and other examples. This led them to discuss other illustrations of excellence and beauty in art and design. Some other students gave clear accounts of the Fibonacci sequence.

13 Wheelchairs

The written text ‘Gold to Australia!’ prompted some students to reflect on a personal experience when they or someone they knew had responded to a situation of difficulty and succeeded against all odds, thus achieving their own gold medal. Some discussed the challenge faced by Australia as a relatively small nation, not only in sport but in world affairs, and commented on how successful this country has been in one field after another.

14 Gold wine

The reference to Midas in this stimulus piece reminded students of the well-known myth of the king who asked Dionysus for the power to turn to gold everything he touched. He soon discovered that riches were useless if the most basic needs of life were not satisfied and that too much of a good thing can be as bad as too little. The story reflects the way Midas and many people like him, driven by the desire to create and accrue wealth, can lose their ability to enjoy the simple things of everyday life. The image of the wine turning to gold in the glass is a reminder of the message of the tale. The parallel today can be found in the stories of people who long to win a lottery, believing that wealth will solve all their problems, yet find that sudden wealth can make their lives change in unexpected ways, sometimes bringing them misery. Many students responded to this stimulus piece with parallel stories or with recounts of the Midas tale. However, expositions and reflections on the theme were also attempted.
Stimulus pieces: visual, written or combination?

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 a stimulus piece (or pieces) and what to write, students should remember that, by the time they reach Year 12, they have a wealth of personal and subject-based knowledge and experience that they can draw upon.

When students use ideas from the written stimulus pieces, there is a danger that they may quote large portions of text directly. This can affect markers' judgments of Length (words from the stimulus pieces are not counted) and Central idea (if 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 2011, the most popular text type for responses was the imaginative, with 40% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by expository pieces, written by 31% of students. Reflective responses accounted for 16% of scripts and 12% 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. They also need to decide which genre will allow them to demonstrate their best 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, e.g. the speech, can have a variety of purposes such as exposition or persuasion. Also, when they choose a genre, they need to be sure they can control its conventions. For example, a narrative should cover a short timespan and a feature article should have short paragraphs.
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. Ten clear categories were identified.

In 2011, the most popular genre was the short story. This was followed by the essay and the speech. It is worth 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 to 100.

Short story — The short story was the most popular genre by a significant margin. Not surprisingly, stories covered a wide variety of topics. 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 or one that is written in the first person with the narrator dying at the end. 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 were inconsistencies and inaccuracies in using tense and narrative perspective.

Essay — The essay was chosen by students of all abilities. 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), a body of writing containing development and explanation of main points, and a concluding paragraph which presented a summary.

Speech — 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. This can be achieved by creating a context that establishes the speaker's credentials and the audience's potential interest. This means students need to ensure that their topic is suitable for this genre, that is, it needs to be a topic that is not contrived and that would interest the audience. For example, an informative speech about gold mining to a convention of mining company executives may not be appropriate.

Media article — This genre includes texts such as feature articles, editorials and journal articles. Predominantly expositional in nature, media articles require students to have a 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. They should also consider the conventions of the genre (e.g. that feature articles have shorter paragraphs than essays).

Biography — Biographical writing includes specific texts such as memoirs, personal reflections and obituaries. The most successful responses 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 were 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. It would not be a good idea to write up an experiment with a list of materials and procedures. Rather, the writing should focus on discussion of the findings.

Critique — Many of the students who wrote in this genre chose to write reviews about books or films that have had an impact on their lives. Another trend noted was that of 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 and were usually reflective in style. This genre is often difficult 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 Central idea and Structuring & sequencing. If they do choose to write a diary, the entries should not be short as this leads to a disjointed feel. Paragraphs are still essential.

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 use these to effect. Conversely, the lower achieving responses commonly fell short of length requirements; this affected achievement in 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.
Criteria and standards

The most successful responses are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 68). 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, they 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>higher achieving</th>
<th>middle achieving</th>
<th>lower achieving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>0.5  10.6  51.5  33.5  3.7  0.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>0.4  9.3  63.3  24.7  2.1  0.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>0.3  6.5  46.1  42.4  4.6  0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>0.2  7.7  52.6  34.3  4.9  0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>0.3  8.7  49.3  37.0  4.3  0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

For the total sample, Vocabulary was the criterion in which the greatest percentage of responses (25.5%) demonstrated highest achievement. Grammar, punctuation, spelling and Structure & 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 2010.
Achievement in specific criteria

Central idea
When assessing this criterion, one is 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. An example of a well-developed central idea can be found in the 2004 Retrospective. The response Market Madness responded to the concept of What matters and progresses from the introductory statement that it is important to look beyond the tourist facade when visiting other countries to a statement in the conclusion that this leads to varied and fascinating experiences.

Vocabulary
Many people believe that 'the bigger the word, the better'. 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. Trying too hard to use complex vocabulary can also detract from a response. The biggest word is not always the best word. Students could look at 'Infinity Mr Carey' from the 2009 Retrospective for an example of simple vocabulary being used for effect.

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 the 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, e.g. 'gold', 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.

Students may benefit from a slightly different approach to their planning. Rather than looking at the paper and thinking: ‘What can I write about?’, it may be better to ask: ‘What do I know a lot about that I can relate to something on this testpaper?’ An example of where this has been done successfully is in the 2009 Retrospective in which 'Austen wants out' is a response that is clearly based on a close reading of Pride and Prejudice. The student has used their knowledge of the novel to develop a very responsive analysis that examines the way Elizabeth Bennett represents a character who is ‘out of her time’.

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
- antecedent agreement (particularly with singular, plural and indefinite pronouns)
- omission or incorrect use of punctuation, e.g. failing to end questions with question marks
- the absence of apostrophes to identify possession.

Some problems are more identifiable by achievement level. Rhetorical questions tended to be used to great effect in higher achieving responses, whereas they were overused in middle and lower achieving responses. The use of varied sentence length and punctuation to create a particular effect (such as rising tension) was more common in higher achieving responses. Middle and lower achieving responses often included 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 did not 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. An example of a very well structured response can be found in the 2008 *Retrospective* when the concept was *Circle*. The student script, ‘Moons in Orbit’, has a circular structure that describes an event in a continuing relationship. The event clearly represents the nature of the relationship but does not attempt to describe the whole. 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 too short, far too short, too long, and far too long responses. While each criterion is considered and assessed independently, Length has the potential to have the greatest impact on achievement in other criteria. In terms of overall performance, those scripts that are far too short are the most likely to be among the lower achieving responses.
### 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRAL IDEA</th>
<th>VOCABULARY</th>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING</th>
<th>STRUCTURING &amp; SEQUENCING</th>
<th>LENGTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For a 1+</strong></td>
<td>the writing demonstrates the deliberate, focused development of a clear central idea (explicit or implicit).</td>
<td>the writing demonstrates the use of words selected for their effect and exactly fitted to their location (the right words in the right places).</td>
<td>the writing demonstrates sensitivities to nuances of the concept and stimulus material.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>about right 500–750 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed</td>
<td>controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</td>
<td>strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</td>
<td>precise and effective use</td>
<td>fluent, logical and flexible</td>
<td>too long 750–1000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifiable but unevenly developed</td>
<td>appropriate</td>
<td>connectedness to the concept and stimulus material</td>
<td>lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning</td>
<td>weaknesses are evident</td>
<td>too short 400–500 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</td>
<td>inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</td>
<td>connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; or weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</td>
<td>lapses obtrude and detract from meaning</td>
<td>weaknesses detract</td>
<td>far too long &gt; 1000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not identifiable</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material</td>
<td>inept</td>
<td>incoherent</td>
<td>far too short &lt; 400 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing Task marking guide:**

**2011 QCS Test**
Selected student responses

The responses to the 2011 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

‘All that glistens isn’t good, either’ is an expository piece that is strongly responsive to the overall concept of the test paper and is directly inspired by stimulus piece 14, with some subtle connections to a number of other pieces. The writer points out that we are wrong to value gold as highly as we do because this metal is ‘pretty and useless’ just like many of the people and things we admire. Iron, however, a much more common metal, and one with a wide range of uses, is not valued highly at all. The response makes effective use of comparisons, both material and metaphorical, to develop the central idea.

Response 2

This untitled story about a child who confesses to cheating on his spelling test has a well developed central idea with Leo’s growing guilt and his confession to the teacher and a strong resolution in the golden reward for his honesty. The response connects clearly to the overall concept and, early in the piece, the writer unobtrusively prepares us for the final reference to the ideas used from stimulus piece 2, the sun that we are thrilled to see, and from stimulus piece 4, the gold star for good work. While the language is simple, the writer has demonstrated a discriminating selection and use of vocabulary and strong command of language conventions.

Response 3

This response, also untitled, is written in the form of an interior monologue in which the speaker analyses the disintegration of his marriage. As his wife prepares to leave him, he considers the changes that have occurred in them both as individuals and in their relationship. The responsiveness to the overall concept is subtle but clear and here is a direct connection with stimulus piece 8, the quotation that points out that it is not enough to have ‘a heart of gold’ if one’s actions conflict with one’s good intentions. In his mind, the speaker addresses his wife, reflecting on the hollowness of the humour in a hackneyed joke that he cannot clearly remember. At the end of his monologue, he tells the joke and sums it up with a bitter comment. The control of structure and the deliberate arrangement of ideas result in a simple story with a central idea that is revealed and developed gradually and effectively.

Response 4

‘Heart of Gold’ compares the ugliness of a stretch of country today with its former beauty. The writer reminisces on the past before the establishment of a gold mine and wonders whether it will be possible to repair the damage that has been done and to retrieve what has been lost. The central idea is skilfully developed and the piece is strongly responsive both to the overall concept and to ideas in several of the stimulus pieces. This response demonstrates effective selection and placement of words and a clear command of language conventions. The result is a well structured and coherent piece of writing.

Response 5

‘The Harvest’ is a nostalgic reflection on the writer’s memories of a childhood when, at harvest time, the women of her community worked, sang, danced and, in the evenings, chatted together. The connections with the concept of gold are subtly worked through the response and there is an obvious connection with the sun of stimulus piece 2. The writing demonstrates discriminating and imaginative selection of vocabulary and command of the conventions of language in an evocative description of a time long past.
Response 1

All that glistens isn’t gold, either.

William Shakespeare wrote that “All that glistens is not gold.” He neglected to mention that all that’s gold isn’t useful. In the context of this quote, gold is synonymous with good, valuable and desirable. Gold is rarely, if ever, used as a metaphor for objects or people that are pretty but useless. It’s a shame that it isn’t; there are so many pretty and useless people in the world that every metaphor possible is needed to avoid repetition. Celebrities are the first such people to come to mind. All those pretty people with great teeth and questionable talent earn millions of dollars a year just doing nothing more useful than saying the right words in the right way. Yet they’re adored rather than resented. Modern priorities: useless over useful, pretty over practical and so forth, reflect the importance our world has historically been attached to gold.

Gold, a mostly useless but rare and aesthetic-ally pleasing metal, is one of the most valuable substances in the world; this legacy represents misplaced priorities of humanity. Since time immemorial, gold has been linked by countless cultures with no contact with each other. The Incas, Mayans, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Greeks, Persians and endless others all laid gold above any other metal, including the steel they used to defend themselves. From people trying to steal steal their gold, to the role gold had no obvious use despite being pretty, other than for value’s sake. Other things
of value such as land, livestock and slaves were purchased with cash sold for gold. Occasionally, gold was purchased with gold: people bought gold items with their gold coins to prove how real gold they had. Gold was the focal point of the ancient world. The legend of Midas reflects this. Midas, a rich and powerful king, was granted the power to turn everything he touched into gold. Unfortunately, he couldn’t turn it back. Sufic to say that his beloved wife died a gold-related death. Despite gold turning Midas into a widower, the phrase “Midas Touch” is used to describe someone that can make good of bad. Gold and the pursuit of it ruined many more lives than just Midas’s, yet gold continues to be a metaphor for all that is good. Despite its only part tangible value being that it is aesthetically pleasing, gold is more valuable than any other metal.

Iron, a common and useful metal, is under-rated by society, just as the working class is. Iron has a number of useful qualities. Everything from cars, to weapons, to surgical tools used to heal those injured by cars and weapons, is dependent on iron. It is hard, strong and malleable when heated. One of the best things about it is that it is common. Commonness is one of its best. Despite being in high demand, the supply of iron ensures that its cost is low. Its other admirable trait of iron is that it can withstand almost any pressure.
or abrasive force. When gold is exposed to large masses of high momentum, it can be irreparably damaged. Iron withstands higher forces and is easier to repair than gold. The previous metaphor of people as metals remains valid. Celebrities seem to make a habit of emotional breakdowns, alcoholism and relationship failures. Meanwhile, the working class battles ever onwards, remaining resilient despite economic downturns, wars and natural disasters. Nonetheless, celebrities are still more valued. They earn more, they are admired more commonly, and they have easier lives. Just like gold, is less protected and is used for less strenuous tasks than iron. Just like the celebrities are more valued than the working class, gold is more valued than iron.

Gold is useless. It does not make one happy, it does not serve a practical purpose and it is completely over-priced. The same can be said of a lot of people, whom we value for their beauty. Like the brainless sheep in Orwell’s “Animal Farm”, people insist upon the endless chant of “Gold good, Iron bad.” For as long as this remains the case, people will continue to be measured by the same traits and “pretty people” will be the most valued in society.
With his thumbs hooked under the slings of his backpack and a tepid patch of sweat rendering his shirt virtually inseparable from his back, Leo trudged up the main street. It was heralded as one of the hottest summers on record in the quiet coastal town, but Leo had to wonder whether the line of unpleasant dollops that adorned his brow and upper lip had anything to do with the humid 30 degree morning. He couldn't believe he'd been so stupid. He had all weekend — minus Friday afternoon — to learn this the spelling list Ms Harrington had set-handed out. The front gate sickeningly creaked as the rusted front gate threatened Leo back to the present. As he waded through a throng of worry-shook Leo up and down, freezing in Leo's belly, instructing him to focus on something else. Wading through a throng of year seven girls, he looked up into the sky. It was pretty overcast for such a stuffy day, he noticed.

Ms Harrington slapped the a blank piece of paper down on Leo's desk. He looked down at the scattered helplessly at the horizontal army of smudged blue beads of blue lines, then to the front of the classroom, where Ms Harrington's flushed, flustered figure fanned her face with the spelling list. Turning his head, Leo discovered he was sitting next to Kim, a shy little eight-year-old who seemed to excel in every scholarly pursuit there was. The number of gold stars Leo had seen on her homework, Kim's homework was phenomenal in his eyes. It was then that Leo's eyes narrowed. He could read without difficulty the neat script scratchings of Kim's name at the top of the page. Perhaps, Leo mused, he could read everything else Kim was about to write.
Before he could think any further about the implications of what he was about to attempt, Ms. Harrington's jewel kept to life: "Alright, year 3," she announced, "let's begin."

"Your first word is 'liquid.'"

Lick-wid? liq-bound? Licward? Leo had no hope. In silent desperation, he slowly allowed his eyes to wander over to the Kim's treat perfect pacer scratchings.

Liquid. Of course.

By the end of the list's end, Leo had copied the spelling of every word on Kim's sheet of paper, bar two he had long known how to spell. Relief washed over his body as Ms. Harrington bustled over to this table and collected his effort. Leo peered out the window let his mind swirl and his head to examine the dark, sinister cloud that hung low out the louvres.

As the day went on, though, Leo found himself revisiting the spelling test over and over in his mind. It was cheating! His thoughts would exclaim, before reminding him that it was a victimless crime. Each rumble of thunder with each barrelling belch of thunder came another morbid thought: What if Ms Harrington figures it out? What if she rings my mum?

He tried to stifle these guilt but only ended up stewing in its swampy heat. In art he merely twisted his paintbrush on the table, the dry bristles crackling under the pressure. In silent reading-time he managed to read two pages before having to restart the chapter.
Then, in the afternoon, as the rain wept down the clear louvres, Ms Harrington handed back their spelling lists. Seeing
upon spotting the little gold star resting on the top of the page, bookended by "Well done!" and "Excellent work," Leo flipped his work over. He had to let Ms Harrington know.

She was surprisingly understanding when Leo admitted everything to her that afternoon. Placidly, Ms Harrington explained to Leo why cheating wasn’t doing him any favours in the long run and slowly walked him through the spelling of each word on the list. Finally, at Leo’s request, she ripped the gold star off his work and launched it into the bin.

When Leo stepped out of the classroom he was buffeted by a warm light that exposed everything he could see, casting long shadows behind him. He squinted as the afternoon sun broke through the clouds. Leo was happy to see it. After all, the sun is just about the biggest gold star you can get.
Two people walk into a bar; sounds like the start of a pretty good joke - maybe not the kind that makes you bend over with great, gasping guffaws, but still one worthy of at least a shadow of a smile. Only problem is, I can't remember how the rest of it went, though I doubt it would be considered funny now, not in this empty house. Well, mostly empty; it was familiar after all, but it's lacking all of the things that make it feel inhabited - the photographs from one have only left behind rings of dust on blank walls, while the only conversation that occurs takes place solely in my head. Your back is, after all, a reflection wall against any attempt at apology, and your shoulder blades seem like an insurmountable curse as I watch you pack the last ten years into a suitcase. I'd say something, but words never do much no matter how loudly we scream them or with what conviction we force them through our teeth; words can't take back what I did to you. Us. Those golden rings we wear.

There's probably a reason you know - for why most wedding rings are gold. I mean, it was probably some kind of underhanded scheme created centuries ago, a way of saying: "look! Isn't marriage such a precious thing, so stable?" Well it isn't. We intend it to be - of course we do. People don't cling together with plans for making each other miserable, no, we plan - we expect - a veritable (golden) age of happiness, love that will last forever, wrinkled hands clasped tight over an entire lifetime...

But in the end, a noise made of gold is still a noise.

You're crying now, because the suitcase won't close over the
mountain of memories you’re taking away. I’d offer you help, but I think that would only rub more salt into the wounds I’ve inflicted. After all, we’re only in this mess because I’m “too nice” – at least according to you. I was too easy to trust, too considerate, too appealing. You fell in love with me just like a line of other girls… a line I never meant to explore, just like I told you, but all my good intentions seemed to crumble once I admitted what I’d done.

“I never meant to hurt you.” That’s what I said, my paltry excuse for spitting in the face of your expectations, breaking all the years we’ve wasted over my knee – as though such a stupid, worthless string of pathetic sounds could allow us to claw back who we were, those shining people who’d found exactly what they needed: someone to hold in the face of that terrifying deluge of passing youth, someone to settle down with among the furniture, the career, the routine – our happy home. God, we were beautiful then, two golden hearts beating to the tune of all that hope! But then we grew tired, we grew older, and that hope turned to resignation, a steady reliance on the fixtures we’d become in each other’s lives. It’s not that we stopped loving each other, it’s just that we stopped caring.

“I never meant to hurt you.” That was sincerity you could hear, but even honesty can’t tear down the consequences of my actions, and all the regret I feel will have no bearing on how you judge me.

You managed to close the suitcase; nothing can stop you from leaving now – you are action personified. As you reach
for the door I remember the rest of that joke: Two
people walk into a bar. They meet, think it's fate, get
married. Both are kind, wonderful people, until the husband has
an affair and admits it. Their marriage is destroyed. Now they
are separate kind, wonderful, empty people.

I think the joke is that even gold can disintegrate in the
end.
Response 4

HEART OF GOLD

Close to where I lived when young is now a mine.

It’s an ugly blight on the land, a cancerous lesion in the middle of what I remember to be an oasis of beauty. Whenever I see my memory rebels, conjuring up pictures of a discarded past. They mine gold there. This part of the country used to be cattle country; parts of it still are. It’s changed, though. I remember it as having rolling green hills and a sky that stretched forever. Summer used to settle on us all like a heavy velvet cloak, too hot for comfort, but dyed rich and vibrant colours to compensate.

At night, the stars used to be the only lights for miles, a million constellations that looked down with benevolent amusement at the silly little creatures who stared boldly back and gave the lights single childish names: Orion’s Belt, the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper.

We can’t see the stars at night anymore. I think they gave up in disgust and turned their attention elsewhere when it became clear that we had chosen floodlights over their gentle fires. Summer is no longer beautiful; now it’s stifling, stained with sweat and grime, the noises of earth-moving machinery muffled but audible. The sky is dark with dust in the east, and the hills? Some of them are still green, a filmy veil that can thicken as you watch it. The cattle aren’t allowed to graze in certain areas, though; the chemicals from the mine wash down from the hills with each rainfall and they would make the cows sick.

Rain used to be a simple blessing. Now it carries a curse as well. It’s just the same as gold, in a way. People prize the
the precious metal, for its beauty and lustre, for its wealth and its status, for its mystery and its allure. History is littered with people spending their lives seeking that ‘Eureka!’ moment, where they’ll know for certain, be utterly, totally, positively sure, that their fortune is assured. What history doesn’t make mention of is that the curse of the Midas touch never affects just one person. There are those who mined the gold in the past, trading sunlight for an ever-constant night, trading fresh air for the noxious gases exhaled by the bowels of the earth, trading a life on the hills for a life in dingy tunnels. There are those who bought, bartered and stole the gold, hoarding nuggets in their cellars until their throats were dry and their newly-reddened wealth was stolen in turn. And of course we mustn’t forget those who were simply caught in the crossfire, whose land was marred and whose livelihood was ruined by virtue of where they lived. There’s a special name for that type of person: collateral damage.

I remember my youth. The land was magnificent once. Now it’s a nearly-barren wasteland. The gentle hills have been reduced to skeletal structures thrust up through their shrivelled coverings, the trees stand against the horizon, the water poisoned even as it falls from the sky. Rain has become a blessing and a curse: it brings water, but often its water we can’t drink. It breathe life into hills where it’s a risk to graze cattle. It clears the snow from the air for a few hours, and we’re able to see the true extent of the damage.

All of this, for gold that disappears into computers and mobiles. A growing cancer of a mine, an environmental nightmare, sprouting roads and waste and dumping sites.
to shore up the unlikely dreams of fortune of some faraway nobody. Our country sacrificed on the altar of avarice time and again.

The 'Eureka!' moment has never really come, and it never will until we realise what's important. Our ravished, sickly, ripped land, the heart of it ripped out methodically and impartially; that's what's important, or what should be.

Perhaps, when all the gold is finally gone, our dazed eyes will open all the way. Perhaps the price our past has warranted won't be too high for us to meet. Perhaps for once our actions and intentions will fuse and blossom into a force great enough to repair the damage.

If we're very, very lucky, perhaps we may not be too late.
Response 5

The Harvest

I remember the fiddle best of all, swelling
of varnish and sweet, golden honeycomb.
So dark and graceful, her neck ever so
slightly curved, like the outstretched arm of
a Medici dancer.

In the early morning gloom, Adelina would
take it lovingly from its_form skin case,
cradling it in the crook of her arm. She
would draw the bow slowly across the
strings, bringing forth that first note, the
song of awakening, of sap rising and the
moon swelling and the sun peeping over the
horizon.

There would come the sound of door being
drawn open and the sigh of early-morning
chatter. The earth was baked so hard
their footsteps would sound like the patter
of fingers on the skin of a drum.

Up in the sky, the air would be silent, the
kind of silence that only comes in the
morning, as though the earth is stretching
herself, easing out aching muscles for the
day ahead.

And then it would begin. Mama Lija,
his lips rose pink but cracked as an old
fence post, would smile. And in her
brass-band voice she would sing. The
sound would sway along the rows of
nagazanaka, stirring leaves and opening flowers.
Accompanied by the stamp of feet and
the rustle of cloth dresses, the harvest
song would begin.

I remember those women, so strong and
brown and finely cheerful. They
would prop their baskets upon hips grown
wide from childbearing and swing down
the aisles, never breaking from dawn 'til
dusk. Together their voices would rise to
the chorus.

I grew as a child, in harmony with that
song. The blood thrummed through my
veins in time with the melody. At night
I would dance and turf on the bare
wooden floor, my feet in their socks
beating out that powerful rhythm. Growing
and swelling and thundering out, and then
returning, always returning.

Those days of harvest were dictated by
the sun. We rose with her and we
lay abed with her, and all through the
day we worked under her praise.
The flowers of the nagazanaka drank her
golden light and gave it up to us,
a thick, yellow, syrupy
dye.

At night, when the sun had business elsewhere, the women would return to the house. I would stand on the verandah and raise my hands above my head and call them in as though they were my subjects, and they would raise their heaped baskets above their heads in a sort of salute.

The kerosene lamp would be lit. Placed around under the eaves they created a halo of protective light. Wayward moths, diverted from their journey toward the moon, would whirling shadows on the wall.

I would sit on the railings, kicking my heels and chewing great slices of Mama's rice cake. This was the time of night I loved best, when I learnt from the chattering of the women the ways of the world. While they would work, distilling the sunshine from the nagesenka petals, they would tell stories. Sometimes, when the talk turned to men and baby-making, my mother would shee me upstairs, but I would open my little window and lean out over the verandah to the roof and listen to their cackling below.
I never will forget those harvest summers,
even as I live now in the black tumble
of the city, with a husband and children
of my own. I still live war to
the rhythm of the song, thundering out
into the world, rushing sweetly into the
chaos of my life, but returning. Always
returning, to that place where the sun
distilled into the liquid of life.