

Retrospective

2012 Queensland Core Skills Test

Writing Task (WT) (Part 3 of 5)

ISSN 1321-3938

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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 2012 testpaper and provides comments on the writing that students produced. The comments are based on an analysis of a statistically significant random sample of student responses. The breakdown of student responses according to stimulus pieces selected and genres of responses is provided.

WT 2012 Overall concept: *Getting there*

Students are required to respond to both the overall concept and one or more of the stimulus pieces. The overall concept linking the 13 separate stimulus pieces on the 2012 testpaper is *Getting there*. The term refers to a deliberate movement towards a place, end point or goal. The focus of the concept can be on the identification of and actual arrival at the end point as much as it is on the process of making one's way there.

Colloquially, *Getting there* refers to the physical action of travelling, not aimlessly, but with a specific destination in mind. At a more abstract level, it can represent the process of moving towards and achieving a successful outcome in an endeavour or it can deal with the process of growth and development towards a personal goal in one's life. It should be possible for students to see a range of applications of the concept. References in the stimulus pieces include the process of establishing and achieving our goals, how we work towards scientific and technical advances, the importance of reducing needless exploitation of resources, the desire to help others along the way towards better times, the significance of the journey, and the joy of arriving.

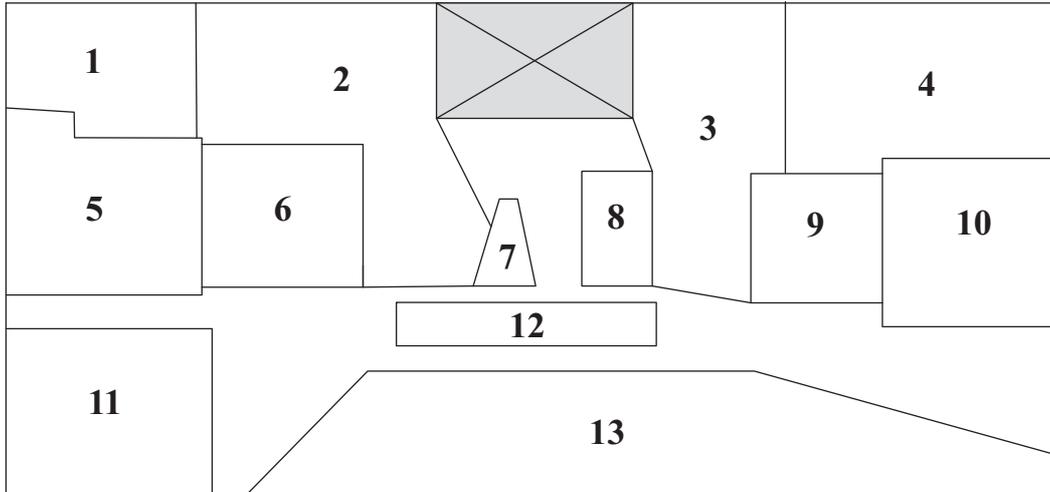
The most successful responses are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 75). The criteria are: Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); and Structuring & sequencing (SS); plus Length (L).

Each response is marked by three independent 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 indicate the length of the response.

Graphs are included to show the distribution of grades awarded in each of the five substantive criteria. The marking guide is included to show the criteria and standards used to grade responses. Finally, a selection of student responses has been included to exemplify successful writing as defined by the task criteria.

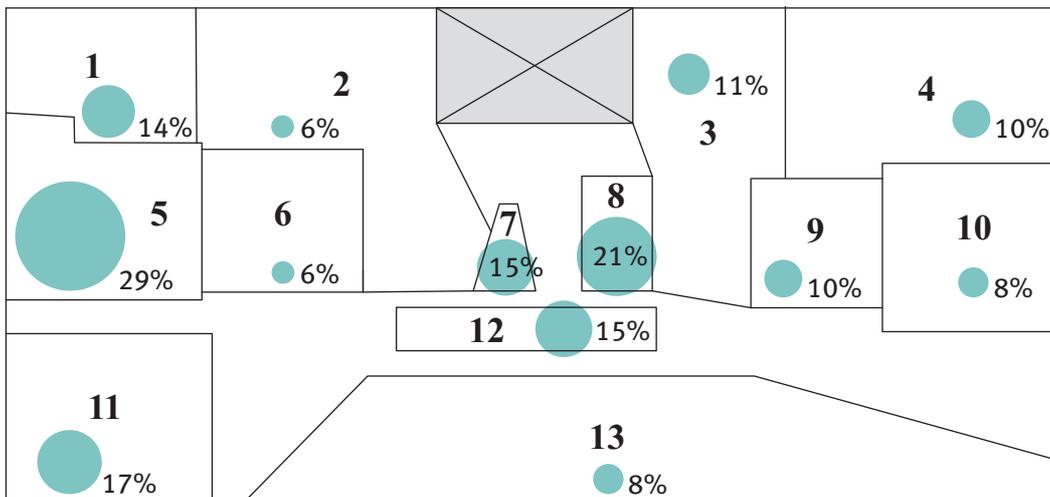
Diagram of the testpaper

The diagram below represents the 2012 testpaper. The 13 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%.



Indication of stimulus pieces as starting point or resource

WT commentary

The following commentary is based on the assumption that students focused on only one stimulus piece as the starting point or source of ideas for their writing. Using a combination of two or more stimulus pieces provided students with a greater variety of possibilities for their writing than those mentioned here.

1 Books

Travel writing and documentaries allow opportunities for readers to learn about other places and other worlds, enjoy vicariously the experiences of others and relive the memories of their own travel. In fiction, the use of a journey can be a strategy to tell a story, develop a character, or explore a theme. A journey can provide a range of locations or minor characters to present challenging situations for a major character. Incidents along the way can present confronting conflicts or new perceptions to the major character and the journey can act as a catalyst for a significant change or realisation or may be the means of taking a character, and perhaps the reader, out of their normal comfort zone. For students, in some cases, 'getting there' could mean getting to the end of the book.

This stimulus piece prompted students to consider these aspects of the topic in books or movies that deal with travel. It allowed them to write their own travelogue or travel story. It provided opportunities for reviews of travel books, film documentaries, novels or movies. Some connected their reading experiences with some aspect of their own means of getting there in the process of personal growth and self-discovery.

2 Telegraph wires

This stimulus piece allows students to consider the impact of technology on international communication and relationships. It prompted some to comment on past, current and possible future conflicts in the world, to consider the desire for peace in what seems to be a constantly troubled world and to ask whether peace will ever be achieved.

Responses were mostly expository or persuasive and included feature articles, reports, and political or historical comment.

3 Explorers

Responses to this stimulus piece included factual or imaginary accounts of early settlers and explorers in Australia and their dreams of discovery, expansion, wealth or power. Some students commented on the results of those early explorations and investigations and how they have compared with the dreams. The motel signpost with its vacancies sign prompted some students to draw a comparison between the resting places used by explorers in past times and the kind of accommodation that many of us find as we explore our world today.

This stimulus piece was applied to a wide range and number of investigations including land, sea and space exploration. Some students evaluated the outcomes of previous work or the potential of current and future work in a range of scientific or technical fields. It prompted some to write about the achievements in recent space exploration or about future possibilities.

4 Arrivals

This stimulus piece focused mainly on the arrival aspect of getting there, although the process of getting there is implied by the image of the airport arrivals board. The written text suggests the pleasure one feels on finally reaching one's destination (or desired result) and finding a welcome (or reward). Inevitably, it suggests the opposite also: that the experience may be one of disappointment. Travellers may look back to the past, to the place and the life they came from with relief or regret, or may look forward with eagerness or apprehension to the future they are now embarking on. They may consider the emotional baggage they bring with them.

This stimulus piece provided students with opportunities for responses that included personal reflections or recounts and analyses of real or imagined experiences of immigrants, visitors and tourists.

5 *Moving out*

All students sitting the test are moving from their final year at school to a new and different stage in their lives. Even if they are not leaving home, their future experiences and adventures are still unknown and the potential lies before them for excitement, happiness, trouble or misery. They have decisions to make, as suggested by the stimulus piece: whether to study further; what career to follow; whether and when to leave home; and what to do with their lives. They will all have some ambitions they hope to achieve. The images of people in clothing that represents a range of careers, the passport, and the Learner and Provisional plates should provide specific examples of some of the choices and milestones that face young people. The street sign indicating a traffic roundabout may also prompt them to think about the directions that people do or do not, take in life in their process of getting there.

This piece provides a starting point for short stories, reflections, inspirational speeches and true or fictional accounts of lives past. Many of the responses to this piece were speculative and imaginative. Some students set out the facts about what lies ahead and where they want to be at some time in the future, physically, materially, emotionally or spiritually and how they plan to get there.

6 *Tourists*

This piece comments on the motives for tourism, a peculiarly human activity, one which has been important to people past and present. It raises the question of the value and purpose of tourism, and questions the pleasure people gain from travelling as tourists. For some, the whole purpose may be to put a notch on the belt to indicate their success in getting there, wherever 'there' may be; for others the purpose and the result of tourism may be a deepening of their understanding of people, culture and themselves.

Students wrote travel journals, memoirs, reflections, accounts, descriptions, discussions, arguments or imaginative texts in response to this stimulus piece.

7 *Are we there yet?*

Most of us have asked this question at some time. The accompanying image of a family car suggests the boredom of a child on a long journey. It may also refer to the stages along the way that mark one's progress towards an end point, whether that is an actual place or a goal of some kind. The question prompts one to think about the value, personal or otherwise, of a destination or goal and the time it takes to get to the destination or achieve the goal.

The piece prompted a range of forms and texts: imaginative, typically in the form of short stories and anecdotes; expository, as in discussions about the destination; reflective, in journal entries or memoirs.

8 *No more turning back*

Franz Kafka's statement holds true for any undertaking that is worth doing and that involves effort, work, hardship, and difficulty. It reminds us that, for some things, we must simply push on until the time comes that there is no longer a choice and then the effort must continue until the end is reached. This quote suggests any number of applications from work and study to sport and other physical activities. Some students applied the words to the process of building and maintaining relationships with others or shaping one's own character and personality. Below the main sign is another, pointing the way to a rehabilitation clinic, a place for those who need to recover from an event or habit and return to good health and wellbeing. The piece clearly refers to the process of getting there and to the end goal.

Responses to this stimulus piece included stories and drama scripts, persuasive speeches, expository media texts, and reflective journal entries.

9 *Our way*

This statement from Geraldine Brooks' Boyer lecture 2011 comments on the importance of helping others, and evokes thoughts of mateship and collegiality. The image of the child being supported by adult hands shows the nurturing of a child and suggests the care of those who are helpless or ill. It also suggests that the inclination to support and assist the vulnerable amongst us is a laudable national characteristic.

Students' writing in response to this stimulus piece included stories, media articles, reflections and persuasive writing.

10 *Nothing but facts*

Scientists and researchers live by these words of Antoine Lavoisier in his *Elements of Chemistry* of 1789. The importance of observation and experiment in science would be difficult to exaggerate. Science begins with recording of observations and scientists rely on experiments, carefully designed and conducted so that they can then observe the results. Every statement or theory must be checked and rechecked. Observations must be accurate and experiments must be repeatable. The recommended process of getting there is clear and indisputable.

This stimulus piece provided an opportunity for students to write scientific reports, factual accounts and descriptions or discussions and analyses of scientific hypotheses.

11 *Where to now?*

The depiction of human evolution on the roadside sign may have reminded some students of T-shirts and posters they have seen. It has a humorous touch in its suggestion that humans have returned to a position reminiscent of an earlier stage but crouched now over their computers.

The question that accompanies the image prompted some students to write speculative expositions or science fiction short stories about the options ahead for human development and the means of getting there.

12 *One's destination*

The quote used in this stimulus piece is from Henry Miller's journal of his time living in the rugged beauty of the Californian coast, exploring his vision of an ideal society. It reminds us that experiencing new locations and meeting different people can affect us in ways that may be life-changing and that can irrevocably change our perceptions of the world and ourselves.

The piece offers students scope to explore real-life incidents and experiences and their effects or to speculate on imaginary travels for others or for themselves in the future. Their responses included stories, biographical and autobiographical writing, journals, reports, speeches and media articles.

13 *Human legs*

Lewis Mumford wrote much about cities, city architecture, society, the way we live and the way he thought we should live. His comment on the value of human legs and the image that accompanies it prompts some consideration of the means of getting there, varieties of transport, technology and the effects of humans on the world we live in. The row of footwear prompts thoughts of the travellers themselves, their fitness and their impact on the environment.

Students responded to this stimulus piece with opinion pieces about the effects of transport and travel, descriptions of facilities for pedestrians and vehicles, stories about the people who might do the walking and reminiscences of their own walks, trips and journeys.

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 attract students and prompt ideas for their 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

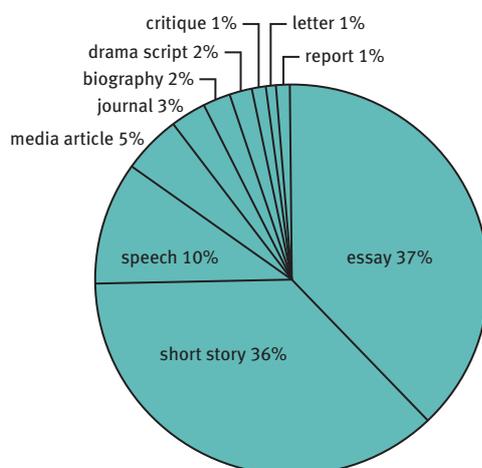
Student responses to a Writing Task testpaper may be categorised, according to their purpose, into four major text types: imaginative, expository, reflective and persuasive.

In 2012, the most popular text type for responses was the imaginative, with 34% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by expository pieces, written by 31% of students. Reflective responses accounted for 21% 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.

Within these broader categories, students need to make decisions about the specific genre in which they wish to write. They also need to decide which genre will allow them to demonstrate their best writing. They should keep in mind, as they plan their response, that some genres, e.g. the speech and the essay, 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. A short story, for example, should cover a short timespan; a media 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 genres were identified.

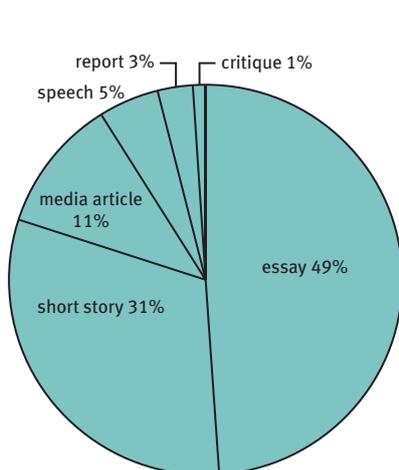


Popularity of genre: total sample

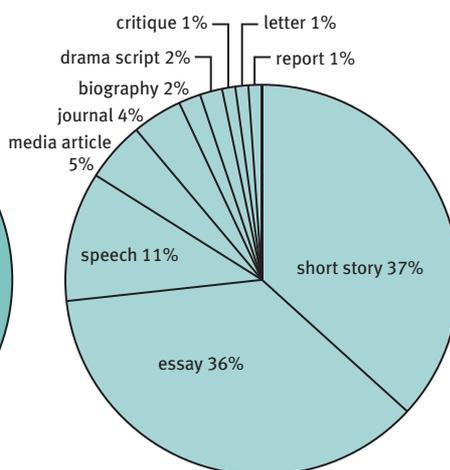
As seen in the diagram above, in 2012, the most popular genre was the essay, closely followed by the short story. The speech was the next most popular. It is worth noting that, while genre conventions are not assessed specifically (although they may affect Structuring & sequencing), students should aim 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

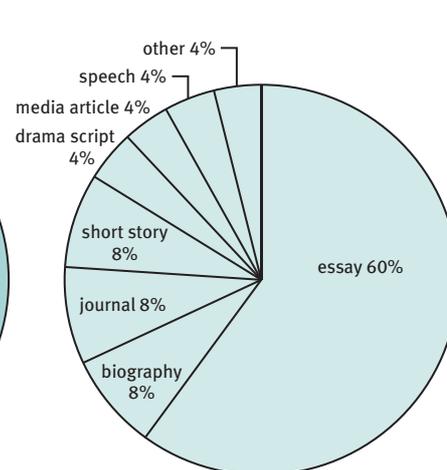
The diagrams below indicate the genres used in higher, middle and lower achieving responses. Note that the percentages shown are rounded.



higher achieving responses



middle achieving responses



lower achieving responses

Essay

The definition of an essay, however, is vague, as it has become a genre required in many school subjects. Perhaps the simplest definition is that it is a piece of writing that usually expresses the author’s personal point of view.

The essay was a popular choice for students of all abilities. This is perhaps because essay writing lends itself to a range of different topics, is a writing style that students use 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.

Short story

The short story was one of the most popular genres amongst the higher and middle achieving responses. Not surprisingly, stories covered a wide variety of topics. The most successful 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.

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 to a convention of company executives may not be appropriate.

Media article

This genre includes texts such as feature articles, editorials and journal articles. Predominantly expository 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. For example, feature articles have shorter paragraphs than do essays.

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 the effect of this can be a rather disjointed response. Paragraphs are still essential.

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.

Drama script

There was only a small percentage of drama scripts this year. Students who write in this form need a knowledge of the specific conventions of the genre, and need to be able to use them to effect. The lower achieving responses commonly fell short of length requirements; this affected achievement in the other criteria.

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.

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.

Report

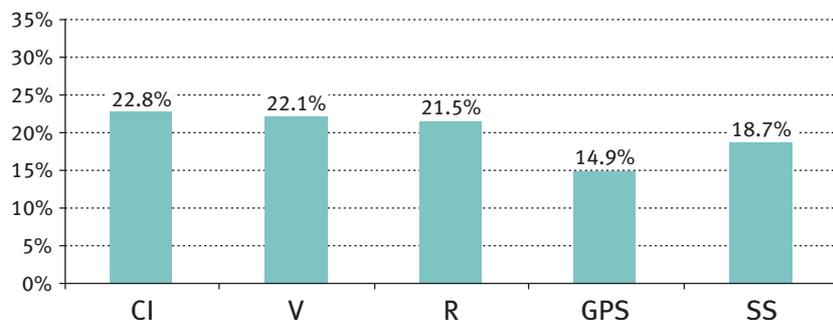
A small percentage of students chose to write a report. Many of these were scientific in nature, perhaps suggesting that students were aware of the genres best suited to their knowledge and experience. While conventions of genre are not assessed specifically, reports should make use of features such 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 a scientific experiment with just a list of materials and procedures. Rather, the writing should focus on discussion of the findings.

Criteria and standards

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

Criterion	higher achieving		middle achieving		lower achieving	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
CI	0.4	12.3	58.3	26.9	2.0	0.2
V	0.4	10.7	70.6	17.1	1.1	0.1
R	0.3	9.5	57.4	30.2	2.5	0.1
GPS	0.2	9.0	60.1	27.6	2.9	0.2
SS	0.3	10.4	56.9	29.9	2.1	0.2

For the responses sampled, the data from the standards awarded were analysed. 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, Central idea was the criterion in which the greatest percentage of responses (22.8%) demonstrated highest achievement. Grammar, punctuation, spelling and Structuring & sequencing were the two criteria in which students were least successful.

Achievement in specific criteria

Central idea

When assessing this criterion, a marker is essentially asking what the response is 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 to reach an intended conclusion? The most successful responses will demonstrate direction — whether explicit or implicit — and resolution. Responses suffer in this criterion when the central idea is unevenly developed or when there are several, perhaps 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 progressed from the introductory statement that it is important to look beyond the tourist façade 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. It is never a good idea to sacrifice meaning for style. 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 Grey’ 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. Response 3 in the 2011 *Retrospective* is a good example of this from a student who has been able to resist the temptation to overwrite even though the subject is emotional. In fact, the reflective tone and direct language gives the piece a power that could have been lost with more ‘impressive’ words. This is not to say the words are simple — more that they suit the purpose.

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 a connection to both the concept and the stimulus piece/s. Therefore, Responsiveness is weighted most heavily of all the criteria. Achievement will suffer where the connection is weak, or where the student responds to either the concept or stimulus, but not to both. The highest achieving scripts in this criterion will exhibit a strong and sustained connection to both. It is important to be aware that simply repeating the concept, *Getting there*, several times is not demonstrating responsiveness. Evidence also suggests that responding to too many stimulus pieces reduces a student’s likelihood of achieving well in this criterion. This is because these responses tend to make only passing or glancing reference to the concept or stimulus.

Students may benefit from a different approach in their planning. Rather than looking at the paper and asking, ‘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 this 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 a strong 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’. Another example from the 2011 *Retrospective* is ‘All that glistens isn’t good, either’. The student has looked at gold both as a substance and as an idea, declaring that ‘what is pretty may not be strong or dependable’. Both the concept and the stimulus piece are used to develop a clear central idea that has levels of complexity and interest.

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 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.

While it is to be expected that higher achieving students will attempt and mostly be successful at more complex language use, there is no suggestion that markers keep a tally of successes or failures. A response that misuses semicolons, colons and em dashes is not necessarily more impressive than one in which every sentence is correct, even though only full stops are used. Markers are looking for correct use of the conventions, not one particular kind of language use or punctuation. For example, advice such as the suggestion that one must use a number of semicolons to be awarded a high grade would be seriously misleading.

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 arise when students do not clearly establish the context of their writing and, consequently, the development of ideas is less sequential. Also, poor proofreading and editing can have a negative impact on writing, particularly when 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 *Retrospective* for 2008 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.

Students should consider their choice of genre when thinking about the structure and sequence of their writing. Although poetry is the only genre that is specifically forbidden, they should think about whether their genre choice will allow them to develop an idea in a clear sequence. For example, writing a 600 word grocery list is not banned but it would be a very bad idea. Students need to consider and discuss what will allow them to develop and demonstrate their best writing.

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, scripts that are far too short are the most likely to be among the lower achieving responses.

2012

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 • deliberate sequencing of ideas and images.</p>	<p>about right 500–750 words</p>	
<p>1 identifiable for intended audience, direction and resolution revealed</p> <p>2 identifiable but unevenly developed</p> <p>3 identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</p> <p>4 not identifiable</p>	<p>1 controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</p> <p>2 appropriate</p> <p>3 inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</p> <p>4 limited</p>	<p>1 strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>2 connectedness to the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>3 connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; or weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>4 no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material</p>	<p>1 precise and effective use</p> <p>2 lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning</p> <p>3 lapses obtrude and detract from meaning</p>	<p>1 fluent, logical and flexible</p> <p>2 weaknesses are evident</p> <p>3 weaknesses detract</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>	<p>1 incoherent</p>

Selected student responses

The responses to the 2012 Writing Task that follow were selected from those that met the standards for successful writing as defined by the criteria and standards for judging student responses. These 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.

With respect to handwriting on the QCS Test, students should be aware that legible handwriting is important. Markers will make a committed attempt to read poor handwriting but they cannot ignore errors due to missing or indecipherable letters. In schools, teachers may become familiar with a student's handwriting and may guess at their meaning or their spelling. Markers cannot do this. They must assess what they see. Time management may be a consideration in producing legible handwriting.

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

Getting there: In Praise of Science as a Way to the Future is a media article that aims to convince the reader that science is the pathway to 'new and greater pinnacles of human achievement'. In a thoughtful and well-informed discussion the writer points out how successive generations of humans have continued to explore the world and the universe. The response acknowledges the recent death of Neil Armstrong and refers to events in history to explain that the journey is not yet over but that science will 'get us there in the end'. The writing is fluent and well-structured and the piece responds clearly and directly to the overall concept of the testpaper as well as to stimulus pieces 10 and 11.

Response 2

Wheels of a Nation provides a tongue-in-cheek response to stimulus piece 6 and to the overall concept. It also pays passing reference to stimulus piece 1. The writer embarks on an investigation and a discussion of what it is that makes Australia such a 'car loving country' by first evoking the family slideshows that recorded road trips of the past. We are then taken on the writer's own road trip and arrival at the first of the chosen destinations which is used to convince us that the attraction lies in the appeal of the road trip to the Australian curiosity to discover what lies ahead. Vocabulary is carefully chosen and, despite some flaws in the expression, images and ideas draw the reader in successfully.

Response 3

In Carpe Diem, the realisation of what is really important in life emerges. It begins with a first-person account of the narrator's early ambitions to become successful. Everything changes when the narrator's sister, Rose, succumbs to illness. The focus changes to Rose as her health deteriorates and she finally dies. The narrator comes to understand that finding peace of mind is what really counts in life. This moving account of self-realisation has a sensitive tone, achieved by means of an effective sequencing of ideas and images and the use of simple language. It is very responsive, connecting clearly to the overall concept and to stimulus pieces 3 and 12.

Response 4

Making the way home is a thoughtful commentary on some of the challenges involved in travelling and the joy of arriving at one's destination. The narrator claims to be one whose childhood has been spent living in and journeying between many countries and reflects on some of the effects of this lifestyle. Then we hear details of the difficulties experienced when travelling as an 'unaccompanied minor' and the pleasure of finally arriving to the welcome of family and friends. The piece reflects a strong sense of purpose and the writer has used a deliberate and effective sequence of images and ideas. The command of language is secure and the vocabulary is selected with discrimination to produce a response that makes a strong connection with the overall concept and with stimulus piece 4.

Response 5

Baggage is an imaginative response that focuses on the three people mentioned in stimulus piece 4, exploring their backgrounds, their thoughts and their observations of one another as they arrive at their destinations. After a moment of connection, each of the travellers goes in a different direction, none entirely happy about the new journey that inevitably lies ahead. The narrative is deceptively straightforward. The three points of view are used to move the story on. The selection of vocabulary creates vivid impressions of the three characters and the language is mostly simple but at times, very skillful. The use of the home countries' names as headings for separate sections at first surprises but does not prevent the development of clear links between the people. References to the bag or suitcase that each one carries subtly suggest the emotional baggage that each one also carries. The Japanese businessman's final question, quoted from stimulus piece 11, applies to them all and supports the connection of the ideas to the overall concept. This piece moves beyond what is presented on the testpaper and, in fact, the response needs the testpaper in order to fully reveal its complexity and strength.

Response 1

"Getting there": In Praise of Science as a Way to the Future'

by Madeleine Livingstone | The Weekend Australian Magazine | September 01-02, 2012 |

We've come a long, long way. Picture the scene - about two and a half million years ago, the sun-swept plains of central Africa. A rather small ape - for nostalgia's sake, let's call her Lucy - is having trouble seeing, well, trouble over the long grass. So she does something so deceptively simple that to us it wouldn't seem like a great leap forward at all - she stands upright. As she makes her way across the savannah, she changes the course of history forever. Her descendants are still around, striding all across the world like so many Colossi. They are, dear reader, all of us - and, oh boy, would Lucy be proud.

We've done a hell of a lot of things since then - tamed fire, invented the wheel, built the Pyramids and the Empire State Building, even walked on the moon. Those of you who own a television set or an Internet connection would be aware that in the past week our quest for exploration and innovation lost a great pioneer - Neil Armstrong, the first Homo sapiens to set foot on another world. It is a great loss, felt keenly the world over. There's been talk in the aftermath of this that perhaps the great age of exploration and discovery is over - that there is no more to find, no more to invent: "We've gotten there already, haven't we?" I've heard it said. To that I pose another question: "Where to from here? What

happens now?"

There are some searches, some voyages of discovery, that can never be complete. They can also never be halted, though detractors may stand in their way - though Galileo faced hindrances from the Church, and today NASA's funding seems to be drying up, rest assured that it shall be a minor pitfall in the end. The human quest for truth, for discovery and science, is an urge too basic and too powerful to be stifled for long.

So how do we "get there" from here? What awaits us now? Last week, a working bionic eye was developed to give the blind sight. The week before that a tiny robot sent us high definition pictures of another planet. The journey is certainly not over yet - we're still getting there, and every step into the unknown yields new and greater pinnacles of human achievement.

Our gigantic telescopes pointed out the sky have shown us entirely new worlds already - over two thousand of them. Our equipment - even the big nasty beastie that is the frightfully misunderstood Large Hadron Collider at CERN - can show us practically the very beginnings of the Universe itself. We can now create life - or close to it - in a test tube. The way of getting there, dear reader, is via the ever-changing path of science. It has its detractors, those fearful of it, as Galileo did, but I am confident that it will get us there in the end.

So praise science, dear readers - it fuels our never-ending

"search for truth" in a way nothing else can. Cast down the churches, even, (to be wildly unpopular) and worship those people in the long white coats instead. The way to the future is via them; via their telescopes and test tubes and little rover robots. Let us continue, then, our voyage of discovery, under the auspices of science and innovation. The road, as J.R.R. Tolkien once said, "goes ever on and on".

Our journey isn't over yet, not even with the passing of a giant, and the end certainly isn't in sight. Don your lab coats, pop on your safety glasses and grab some gloves - we've got a long way to go before we "get there", and we've got an awful lot to discover along the way. Trust in science, and keep on hurtling towards the future - whatever it might bring.

Wheels of a Nation

Australia is a car loving country. From the big family six cylinder sedan, to the driving virgin's beat up old bomb, our nation loves the automobile. It's a love affair that begins at a young age, engrained in our childhood on the nights our parents would wheel out the projector for a slideshow of their old roadtrips. On those nights you were forced to endure what seemed like an endless stream of old Kodachromes depicting your younger parents. Mothers confusing you with beautiful bikini bodies on a secluded white sand beach. Fathers giving you a glimpse of your future in singlets, stubbles and sandals leaning against the hood of his first Holden, a glorious mullet waving wistfully in the wind. You begin to notice a recurring trend appearing in these photos. It's not often that you see a shot of your parents side by side at their friend's wedding or watching the first bounce on Grand Final Day. No doubt these photos are there, however almost undetectable amidst the piles of pictures showing empty country roads, the portraits of your parents standing next to the World's Blankest Blank. Rarely is the destination documented, rather it seems the journey is the moment worth remembering.

With this in mind, I decided to partake in an aimless Australian roadtrip of my own, and after a drunken night of playing darts with a map of the nation in lieu of a board, I loaded a random assortment of supplies in the boot of an old Kingswood and hit the road, ~~inspired~~ ^{inspired} by Kerouac however aiming for less gratuitous drug use and forced alliteration. With a beagle named Charlie riding shotgun, the Thelma to my Louise, the trip began.

Like most roadtrips, my focus was on getting there rather than what was there, and once out of the city I began barreling toward my first randomly decided destination. In typical fashion, the first few hours were an unbridled enjoyment. Windows rolled down, Richard Clapton on the stereo, Charlie's head stuck out the window. I refused to heed the singing Dick's warnings and found myself slipping in love with the girls on the avenue, particularly those with the audacity to stroll on by with a rosebud smile. Of course, I was delusional if I expected this good fortune to last, and on a country highway two hundred kilometers from absolutely nowhere, I was being punished for this naivety. After an ominous cloud of smoke began billowing from under the bonnet of the Holden, I pulled to the shoulder and found myself in a very Wolf Creek scenario. This paranoia reached a paramount when a bearded bloke who was a few teeth short of a smile pulled over to offer assistance. Ordinarily my eyes would have to be painted on to accept this offer, but I gambled, perhaps influenced by my desperate situation and allowed him to hitch the car up and tow it back to his house. Fortunately this did not result in a premature death, and after describing the problem using words like 'carburettor', 'gasket', and 'manifold', he introduced me to his doppelganger of a wife, who generously cooked a meal for both myself and Charlie while interrogating me as to whether I had accepted Jesus Christ as my lord and saviour. After an awkward afternoon, the two eventually sent us off on our merry way.

The next day I arrived at the first of my dark decided destinations, and it proved to be everything I had hoped it would be: a complete disappointment. After a short stretch of the legs, I was able to

climb back in the Kingwood and recommence my roadtrip, putting me back on the metaphorical road to discovering what fuels our attraction to the literal one. What makes the roadtrip so quintessentially Australian? The unplanned adventure. The reckless impulsivity and the insatiable curiosity that drives us to drive cars, to discover what's on the horizon, what's over the next hill.

Carpe Diem

I wanted to achieve. The desire to be the best consumed me, I would do whatever it took to arrive at that place, wherever or whatever it was, knowing I had made it. Knowing my parents and sister would not only be proud of me, but also astonished I could be that good. It gave me goosebumps to think about.

Rose was my older sister, and she did nothing. No early morning trainings for any sport to perfect... well anything. No extra tutorials to ensure she secured her ranking in physics, which probably was not worth securing anyway. Nothing. She just piddled along, content with her mediocre life, dreams and ambitions non-existent. She did have a large group of loving friends, and she was always so happy, but that was it. Optimism could only get you so far. I could never work out what she was so happy with; she did not have a colourful wall of achievements celebrating how good she was like I did, nor did she have a thick folder of certificates congratulating her on another High Distinction. She had friends, health, and happiness, and yet no big plans! She was never going to get anywhere, and it infuriated me. Sometimes I thought about sharing a dream or goal with her, but quickly decided there was no room. My hard work would pay off, I knew it, but hers...

I wanted to discover the cure for cancer. I wanted to walk through our front door and say,

"Hey Dad, look what I got today. Guess who made it!"

Only then would I be able to stop working so hard, would I be able to get rid of the anxiety in my stomach, only after I had got there.

The Autumn leaves drifted down through the crisp evening air like

snowflakes, stunning in their simplicity. I was filled with excitement, pride and hope for the future, and was fairly certain the lectures were destiny for me. I clutched a letter from Oxford, announcing I had received a full scholarship to study there. I was so close to making it! I did not know it was possible to go from a feeling of pure elation to a feeling of pure dread so quickly, but as I rounded the corner to our street, I experienced a tsunami of panic, pain and terror. An ambulance was bundling my sister through its doors. She looked so vulnerable, ^{small}. Time slowed down and I was sprinting, time sped up and I was falling, time stopped, then started. Apparently it continued.

Rose was very sick for a very long time, and I had had no idea. Too caught up in my own life to notice how pale and thin she was. My parents had done everything they could for so long, but she was too ill now. No one had wanted to distract me from my goals - I felt physically sick when I heard this. Who was I?! Perceived to be too ambitious to care about my sister! They had a point though. When I showed the letter from Oxford to Mum she cried, I have never seen someone so proud. Then she wept when I said I was not going to move that far from Rose, tears from shock, astonishment or love. I'm not sure. I had begun to realise where I wanted to go, finally a clear destination.

Visiting Rose every day completely changed my perspective on everything. Her sickness turned me right off medicine, but her compassion drove me into International Relations. I wanted to help people all across the world find happiness, ^{and safety} and this was not just my dream, it was ours. Rose lost some of her friends, they found it too hard to visit, but she was always so thrilled with those who mustered up the courage to come and smile for as long as they could, or just be with her. She eventually lost her health as well, sucked out of her fragile body in the most excruciating process I could imagine. I truly felt like giving up my health too, but Rose would not allow that!

"So long as you keep finding things fascinating, keep finding delight in the little things, you will keep finding joy. And if that's not getting you to that place you so desperately desire to reach, I don't think you will ever get there! Carpe Diem, seize the day before it seizes you."

I read her last letter to me every night, and it now takes pride of place on my previously loved and proud shelf. I am not perfect, and I have definitely not arrived in finding the peace of mind she had, but I'm getting there, and that is all that matters.

MAKING THE WAY HOME

I've been a frequent flyer ever since I first got here. In fact, I suppose you could say that my infant mind hardly had time to adjust itself to the vice grip of terra firma, before it was soaring far above it. ~~Within the first nine months of my life, I had flown from Hong Kong, to Xi'an, then on to Istanbul. For the next thirteen years my passport was a scrapbook of stamps and signatures:~~

~~London Heathrow, Chicago, Guam, through to Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, then all the way back around to China to live in Beijing for a relatively stable tenure in junior school.~~
By the time ^{my family had} moved to the antipodean reaches of Australia, I had set foot in over 32 countries.

They say that expatriate brats never really settle — nor do they really have the humble character to want to — and that, ipso facto, they never really form any lasting relationships. To do so, it seems, would be to consign yourself to the humdrum complacency of the masses. ~~It's easy for me to see the logic in that.~~ It's fair to say that I suffer from a particularly lethal case of wanderlust, and perhaps an intolerance for stagnancy. But this compulsion to culture consumption, this gluttony for life, belies the fact that even nomads need a home base, and people with whom they share a collective memory.

I remember one day not so long ago, where I found myself on the way to what is possibly the closest ~~anyone~~ ^I like me can get to call a home. That is, my birthplace: Hong Kong. I was travelling alone for the first time — the enviable title of 'Unaccompanied Minor' — a position of independence with almost mythical proportions among ~~travelling~~ ^{lonely} children. But, while for most it is the ^{lonely} flight itself that strikes cold fear into their hearts, for me it was the intermediary steps — the process of actually getting there — that freaked me out. Venturing ~~out~~ into the throng of businessmen, tourists, pilots, ^{all being} processed through the soulless machine of an airport, without the practised parental escort, demanded a subtle courage of me. What kept me going was the thought of finally getting to my destination.

Surviving ^{the horrors of} customs at any place, without being intimidated by the hard stares and even harder silence — punctuated only by the snaps of stamps and hum of wheeled suitcases — is the mark of an experienced traveller. It helped to know that everyone around me was undergoing the same slow torture. There ^{was} an underlying sense of tenuous camaraderie, as we were all sitting ducks in what is, essentially no man's land. This, you realised, is limbo. Somewhere between Melbourne Tullamarine, the stopover at Changi, and arriving at Long Kai Shek, I had lost track of the gelatinous pace of time. The aching lethargy of my

temporary companions, weighed down by their papers and carry-on luggage, was contagious. We all crept forward, dumb with impatience, waiting to get our chance to step over the threshold. I could not have been happier when the jaded officer—moving with formulaic precision—verified that I was, in fact, the ^{grim,} ¹spectacled preteen in my passport photo, and waved me through. The worst was over.

I knew I was nearly there as I ¹stood underneath the slithering and shuddering digits in the baggage claim — ~~the~~ ~~area~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~baggage~~ ~~claim~~ — flights, cities, and arrival statuses. Hauling the unwieldy travel case off the carousel, I practically ran to the waiting ^{area} ~~hall~~; part of me feared that my delayed flight meant that my relatives had given up on me and left. I skidded to a halt in a grand ^{hall} ~~gallery~~ of riotous noise and ecstatic reunion. Everyone around me, their expressions hovering ~~undecided~~ between shellshock and relief, scanned the crowd for faces they knew. I did the same. The feeling that came over me as I spotted them — my aunt, my cousin, and my childhood nanny — took me completely off guard. I felt light, as though the burden of solitude in a march of strangers had just been lifted off me.

Yet, at the same time, I recognised a warm ¹ contentment: the rare moment of being grounded.

I had finally made it home. I may very well lead a transient lifestyle, hopping from place to place, but it's the very tangible feeling of

getting there in the end that makes it all worthwhile.

Response 5

Baggage

NIGERIA

It was nothing like she had expected. The air was cooler. Cleaner. Even the landing was better; nothing like the raggedy tumble of wheels on the dusty, Nigerian earth. Passengers rushed around her, collecting trolley after trolley of suitcases bulging with souvenirs from their exotic holiday destination. She could tell they were eager to return to their families. Just a few days of minimal food and water has that effect on people. She glanced down at her own tote bag. Tattered but exploding with colourful threads and fringes, it was the symbol of a true Nigerian earth mama. She'd seen others look at it in mild amusement, and some even in disgust, and she had reddened with shame; hidden it behind herself. But now, she flaunted it proudly. Slung it across her plain black dress for the whole airport to see. She didn't care. She was seeing her sister.

SCOTLAND

She felt the heavy suitcase strain as she struggled to lift it off the conveyor belt, her frail arms flailing wildly, grasping onto pieces of the bag... a zipper, the wheel... there! The handle! Heaving it off, she stopped to catch her breath. This must be what weightlifters feel like. Shameful, she thought. Did no-one even think to help a harmless old lady? Irritated, she haughtily pushed the trolley towards the Arrivals gate. Shameful. She bored her eyes into everyone, even clucking her tongue at some as she walked past. Just shameful.

JAPAN

The suitcase hung still from his hand as he made his way to collect the rest of his luggage. There's the old granny, smiling at the rest of the passengers who were too busy with screaming children and toppling suitcases to help her. He smiled in slight amusement. It was just like his ojii-san. And that exotic African woman with the strange bag. Jangling with beads and bells and laced with colourful patterns as intricate as his wife's kimono, it was as mysterious to him as the woman herself. She'd caught him staring, ^{hurried} hastily hidden it in what seemed like embarrassment, and had ^{hurried} towards the doors. He'd wanted to chase after her, shout, "No! I think your bag's wonderful! I just wanted to have a look at it!" But she'd already disappeared through the closing doors, the mysterious bag disappearing with her. Silently, he collected his luggage and made his way out.

NIGERIA

"Kate! Kate!"

It took her a while to realise she was the source of excitement for the unfamiliar face at the edge of the throng of people. Her sister had insisted that she change her name to something more Westernised. Something more normal. And there she was, arms outstretched, her body enveloping Kate's own overworked one. It was like a mother[^] protecting her young. Or rather, more like a hurricane swallowing a small village.

Her sister had insisted she speak English and her tongue lolled senselessly in her mouth as she tried to form the right words, affect the right accent like her sisters. After some slight hesitation, she managed to murmur out a soft, "Where are we going now?" Her sister laughed excitedly, her eyes dancing with anticipation. "Home silly, we're going back home!" Kate's smile remained frozen on her face, as still as the river in the morning, before it is disturbed by the villagers. No. This is not home. Home is dusty roads and muddy waterholes. Home is dark huts and barefoot children. This is not home.

SCOTLAND

She glanced around in deflated anticipation. Of course no one came to pick her up, they're all probably still at work. Her attention was caught by 2 sisters chatting excitedly in the corner, peals of laughter ringing out as clear as the bells of the St. Andrew's Church every Sunday. Sighing, she made her way to the exit, she knew she wouldn't recognise a face in the crowd, but she'd hoped, as she'd always done, that she would be able to experience what that Nigerian lady felt, rushing into the comfort of familiar bodies and faces. Or that Japanese man with his wife.

Where will she go?

JAPAN

He stepped cautiously into the Arrival hall. She might not even be here. Pushing away the pang of guilt that started to permeate his entire body since saying goodbye to his wife, he saw the familiar brown hair, those sunglasses that never seemed to leave her bed of messy curls, her favourite blue bag. As he caught her eye, she squealed and dropped the bouquet of flowers she was holding, leaving them discarded in a jumbled mess as she hurled herself at him. "Your wife didn't ask any difficult questions did she?" Her lips pouted as she played the same

self pitying act.

"No. No she didn't."

He found himself getting irritated at the whole situation. He'd been thinking about it the whole plane trip. His wife, his children. He never wants to leave them again and he's going to tell her that now, tell her that it's all-

"So, where to now?"