

Retrospective

2013 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 can respond in any form or style, except poetry, to this concept and to as many stimulus pieces as they wish.

This section describes the 2013 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 2013 Overall concept: *Things unknown*

The overall concept linking the 14 separate stimulus pieces on the 2013 testpaper is *things unknown*. This term should suggest ideas of searching for information, knowledge and understanding through investigation and exploration. This concept implies that, if there are things unknown, there are inevitably things also that are known, that will become known, or that should become known. Such thoughts bring to mind areas of scientific and technical discovery, inquiries into events of the past or speculations about the future and our lives in it. There are no areas of human interest in which everything is known, and so it should be possible for students to relate the concept to many areas of interest. Moreover, a major focus for every school subject students undertake is the need to understand what has been unknown previously. *Things unknown* also hints at mysteries and secrets, and so the concept could be the starting point for tales of mystery or science fiction stories. The term is broad enough that students should see a range of applications for this concept, including their own personal search for meaning in life and for self knowledge.

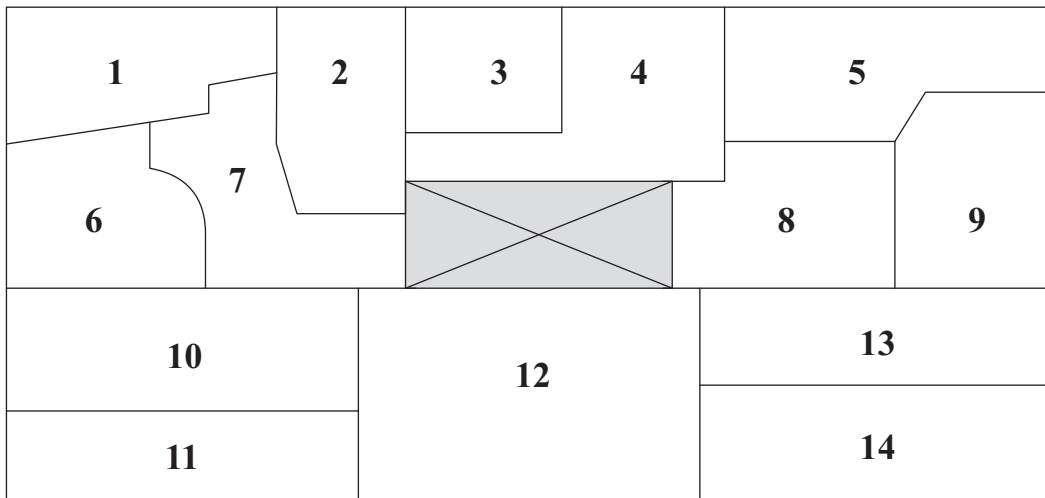
The most successful responses are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 65). The criteria are: Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); and Structuring & sequencing (SS); and Length (L).

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.

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.

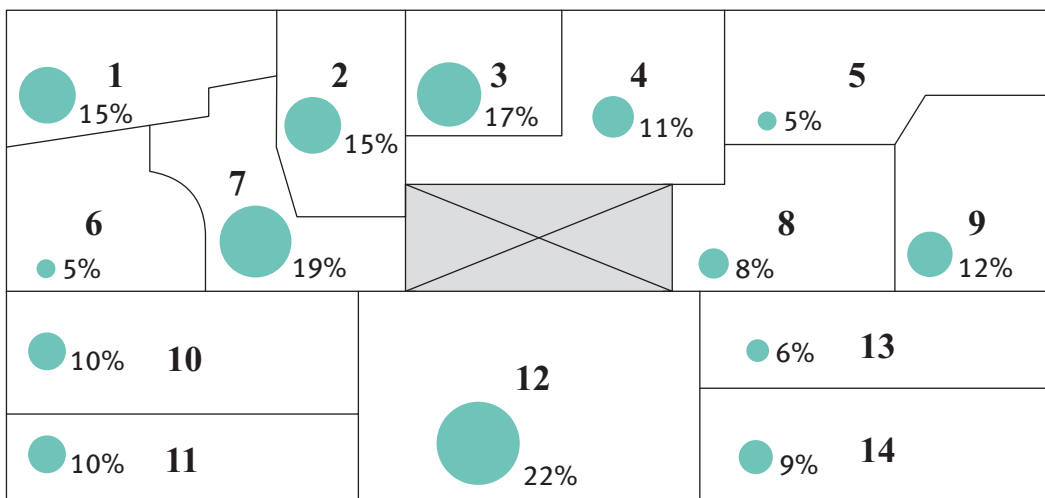
Diagram of the testpaper

The testpaper includes 14 separate pieces of stimulus material relating to the concept.



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 would use the overall concept in combination with only one stimulus piece as the starting point or source of ideas for their writing. However, many used a combination of two or more stimulus pieces in developing their response, thus opening up a greater variety of possibilities for their writing than mentioned here.

1 *Motivation*

The image of the ancient map and compass and the written text of this stimulus piece might suggest to students that they could respond with an account of a little-known event or journey from the past or an analysis of the intentions, exploits and actions of adventurers and leaders who have set out to achieve individual or national success. The piece would allow students to write about riddles of the past, such as the statues of Easter Island, the ancient ruins of Cambodia or the significance of cave paintings in our own country and other parts of the world. They could analyse the nature of an ancient society as holding the key to some of the questions of our world today. They could speculate on the nature of human beings and what drives them.

2 *Foreign place*

This stimulus piece appealed to students who had a special interest in history, geography, languages, dance drama, film or literature. For some, the images stimulated recollections of places they had travelled to or where they had lived, or of places they had heard of and read about. The written text prompted them to reflect on the origins of some behaviours or customs and, in some cases, to make a comparison with something they were familiar with in their own culture. Some students wrote commentaries on Australia as the 'foreign place'. They gave accounts of customs they found unusual or misunderstandings that arose for them. Some students presented the benefits or the disadvantages of individuals, communities or nations being different. Some discussed their own feeling of being different from those around them in their own land or in their own community or group. The piece was commonly linked with several others, including stimulus pieces 4 and 14.

3 *Privacy*

The media remind us of the accuracy of the statement in this stimulus piece every day. Technology is making it ever easier to communicate, and messages can be spread far and wide almost instantaneously. This has huge advantages; it also has the potential for danger. Many students wrote expository or persuasive responses relating to the need to keep some things private or unknown or about the value of openness. They discussed the use or misuse of information and communication. They responded with narratives, real-life or fictional, about the results of information not being kept private.

4 *The Unknown Soldier*

Every nation honours its unknown soldiers; those who have died in the course of war. The written text is an extract from the speech by Paul Keating, the Prime Minister of the time, on Remembrance Day in 1993, when he delivered the eulogy at the funeral service for the Unknown Australian Soldier. His words, together with the faded photograph that shows a group of faceless military men, invited speculation about those who have experienced war and those who look on. Some students continued the speech and some responded in stories or fictional accounts of experiences during or following a military conflict.

5 *Solved mystery*

The comment about our fascination with suspense and mystery in stories and in real life and our need for solutions prompted some students to respond with accounts or analyses of stories they knew in the genres of mystery or crime. Some responded with mysteries of their own. In some responses, this piece was linked with stimulus pieces 8 and 14.

6 *Secrets of the kitchen*

This stimulus piece invited stories of culinary successes or failures, dealing with the secrets of successful cooking. It led some students to write descriptions of dishes with secret ingredients or to speculate on what

makes a particular dish special. It also proved to be the starting point for many responses that focused on family relationships. Some students linked this piece with stimulus piece 9.

7 Calendar

Students responded to one or more of the four unconnected statements jotted on the pages of a desk calendar. They typically combined their chosen statements with other stimulus pieces on the testpaper. Some wrote media articles and some wrote end of year speeches, persuading the audience to face the future with courage, or giving advice on planning a career. Some discussed the art of questioning or explored their own nature. Some responded with a story that illustrated one of the statements. Some discussed a human endeavour in which something was not yet discovered and then suggested how it could be revealed. Finally, there were some who faced up to the rather confronting question of 'Who do you think you are?' by engaging in some self reflection.

8 Questions

Some responses to this stimulus piece were accounts of exciting mathematical or scientific investigations in which someone finds the answer to a perplexing problem. Other responses included biographies of successful investigators, explorers, engineers or technicians or speculative discussions of solutions to mysteries of the world and the universe in which we live. Some applied the statement to the work of composers, choreographers, sculptors, artists and others who strove to create things of beauty. Others discussed the thrill of solving problems in mathematics, working out a Sudoku puzzle, or succeeding in a challenging computer game. Some students combined this with stimulus pieces 1 or 9.

9 Success

Students used this stimulus piece as the starting point for a story of individual success or a discussion of the reasons for success. Some drew their examples from the fields of sport, entertainment, business, industry or technology and some even used examples of ordinary people who overcame particular difficulties to achieve personal success. Many students analysed their own experiences of success in life so far.

10 Einstein

This statement opened a wide range of possibilities. It deals with the fascination of the unknown: those things that engage and intrigue us, and refuse to leave us in peace. Some wrote about the beginning of a work of art or a scientific study. This piece was often used with stimulus pieces 8, 12, 13, and/or 14.

11 Myths

Students responded to this piece by retelling myths from the past and from a range of cultures. Some responses explained the source and function of a specific myth and some attempted to describe the culture. In some responses, it was used in combination with stimulus pieces 2, 5, and 14.

12 The universe

This stimulus piece allowed students to provide explanations of the beginning of our universe. Some were combined with stimulus piece 11 and described the beliefs of various cultures and groups. It gave many students the opportunity to share their personal beliefs.

13 Music

Students responded to this piece with accounts of their own experiences and with descriptions of musical compositions, dances, and art works that give them pleasure, focusing especially on the aspects that make music powerful and fascinating. Many tried to account for the aspects of music that remain elusive and inexplicable.

14 This land

The initial focus of this stimulus piece is the Australian landscape. It prompted reflections and expositions on the nature of this country. It was also the starting point for stories of exploration from the past, or of adventures in the outback. In some responses, the stimulus piece was associated with other places and other worlds. Some students used it in conjunction with stimulus pieces 1, 5, and/or 11.

Stimulus pieces: Visual, written or combination?

Students have the option of responding to the visual images, the written texts, or a combination of both. This year, 52% of students responded to both visual and written stimulus pieces. An additional 35% responded to only written stimulus pieces and a mere 10% responded to only a piece of visual stimulus. Stimulus pieces for the WT are selected to maximise appeal for a wide cross-section of the Year 12 population. The material chosen is designed to be attractive to 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 the 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 the student's style, or when quotations are used out of context or incorrectly (affecting Structuring & sequencing, Vocabulary, and Grammar, punctuation, spelling).

Choice of text type

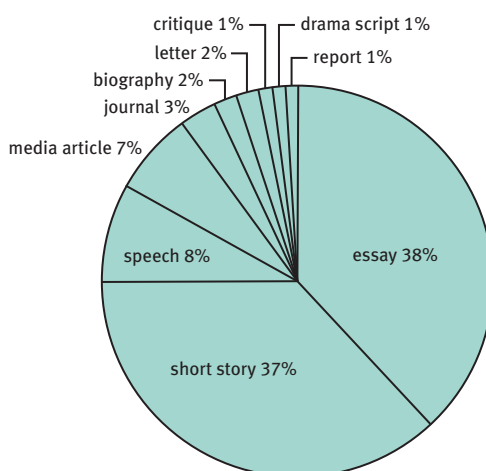
Student responses to a WT testpaper may be categorised, according to their purpose, into four major text types: imaginative, expository, reflective and persuasive.

In 2013, the most popular text type for students was the imaginative response, with 37% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by expository pieces, written by 36% of students. Reflective responses accounted for 15% of scripts and 12% of responses were persuasive. When determining which text type to use, 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 2013, the most popular genre was the essay, closely followed by the short story. Speech and media articles were 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 about ‘what they know’ — giving their writing authority and authenticity.

Essay

The definition of an essay 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. 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 and 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 the criteria of 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

Speeches ranged from the informative to the persuasive. 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.

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 the criteria of Central idea and Structuring & sequencing. If students do choose to write a diary, the entries should not be short as the result 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.

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.

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, perhaps suggesting that students were aware of the genres best suited to their knowledge and experience. The genre conventions of a report should be used. 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 a discussion of the findings.

Achievement in specific criteria

In discussing specific criteria, reference is made to selected student responses which begin on page 67.

Central idea

When assessing this criterion, a marker is essentially asking what the response is about. That is, what is the student writing about and 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, this has a negative impact on this criterion.

The reflection, *Tribute to an Unknown Soldier* (see page 67), offers an example of a well-developed central idea. The writer has come to a cemetery to visit the grave of a loved one, but is distracted by seeing the grave of the Unknown Soldier. The central idea of the response is the sadness of a sacrifice that can never be known. The response is developed effectively, first, by means of a comparison with the narrator's knowledge of Tim and lack of knowledge about the young man buried beneath the unnamed cross. This is followed by the narrator speculating on the nature of the soldier's death and wondering about his family and the events of his young life. The central idea is resolved effectively by the narrator clearing away the weeds, penning a note of gratitude and leaving the flowers brought for another on the grave of the one who may be unknown but who 'is not unloved'.

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 selected deliberately for effect and exactly fit their location within the text. While students should aim to demonstrate a knowledge 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.

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.

The writer of *Discovery: the Purpose of Science* (see page 71) has selected and used vocabulary appropriate to the nature of the response, an expository piece. The article is attributed to Pat Kuttir and has been written for the layperson, about the role that scientific knowledge has played in discoveries that have led to the outstanding technological advances made by humankind. A topic of this kind can sometimes tempt students to use language that is overwrought and ornate, in an effort to impress. In this case, the writer has selected vocabulary with discrimination. It is mostly straightforward, maintaining the accessibility of the subject matter. Technical vocabulary is used sparingly. An example of strategic use of vocabulary is the decision to paraphrase, rather than quote, stimulus piece 10, allowing it to be used effectively to develop the response. The control of vocabulary contributes strongly to the success of this response.

Responsiveness

The piece of writing that a student produces for the WT 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, *things unknown*, several times is not demonstrating the criterion 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 such responses tend to make only passing or glancing reference to the concept or the stimulus pieces.

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?’

In ‘About your task’ (on the testpaper) students are instructed to use the stimulus pieces as ‘starting points’ for the responses. In *An Elemental Influence* (see page 74), the writer has chosen to use stimulus piece 5 and, to a lesser extent, stimulus piece 2 as clear starting points for a response that also connects strongly to the concept of *things unknown*. This is a media article. By focusing on the crime fiction hero, Sherlock Holmes, the writer, a fictional Louise Lea, has wisely chosen familiar subject matter and has used it well. At the outset, she enquires into the continuing popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories and suggests the reason is their relationship to the feelings of discomfort that humans have when they do not know all the answers (as mentioned in stimulus piece 2). The writer then uses the thoughts about suspense and mystery that are discussed in stimulus piece 5 to develop the response to its conclusion. Not only are there clear connections to the chosen stimulus pieces, but the response focuses throughout on the overall concept.

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. To achieve a high standard, students must consistently demonstrate precise and effective use of grammar, punctuation and spelling with few errors. This includes exploiting the conventions of writing for specific purposes and effects. Student achievement in 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
- errors in 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 or adding apostrophes to plurals.

The writer of *Society’s Fear of the Unknown: Asylum Seekers* (see page 76) shows a strong and consistent command of the conventions of language. Sentence structures show impressive variety and punctuation has been used effectively, especially in the placement of commas. As a result, the argument is progressed clearly and the response flows well. There is a sense of balance in some places; the first sentence provides a good example of this. There are exceptions but generally these exceptions appear to be the result of careless use or omission of words, as in ‘impeding on’ (page 1, paragraph 1, line 7) ‘the imbalance and abuse of power’ which should read ‘the imbalance in, and abuse of, power’ (page 1, paragraph 2, line 1). There are also some spelling errors, but they are not frequent, nor are they substantive.

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, particularly when students include information that is superfluous to the purpose, thereby weakening the response. In short stories, this often results from including too much unnecessary description. Of course, one thing that students can do to contribute to a well-structured response is to plan a clear 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

genres or forms will allow them to develop and demonstrate their best writing in about 600 words of continuous prose.

The writer of *Astra Nullius* (see page 79) has written a straightforward narrative about how a young child, Marion, grew to be the much respected Captain Kestrel of the Galactic Naval Fleet. The sequence of highlights in her life is chronologically ordered from her childhood when she was inspired to explore the stars, through to enlistment and graduation from the academy. The story highlights her being made Captain and receiving her first commission. As this is the realisation of her goal, the story ends by showing her in command on the bridge of her ship, much respected by her crew. There are no jarring digressions. Events and dialogue are only included if they lead to the climax. This is an effective example of biography.

Length

The WT 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.

At first glance, the writer of *The Charm of Mystery* (see page 82) seems to have written too few words. But appearances can be deceptive. Student penmanship may be problematic when determining the actual length of a response. For this reason markers are trained not to rely on first impressions. They read the piece and then determine its true length with the aid of a 'ready reckoner' that classifies the piece's length. This improves the reliability between markers with respect to length. In the case of *The Charm of Mystery* the response is 'about right' at 596 words.

2013

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>identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed</p> <p>identifiable but unevenly developed</p> <p>identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</p> <p>not identifiable</p>	<p>1 controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 appropriate</p> <p>4 inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 limited</p>	<p>1 strong (immediate or subtle) and sustained connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 connectedness to the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>4 connectedness to either the concept or stimulus material; or weak connectedness to both the concept and stimulus material</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 no connectedness to the concept or stimulus material</p>	<p>1 precise and effective use</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 lapses intrude but do not detract from meaning</p> <p>4 lapses obtrude and detract from meaning</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 inept</p>	<p>1 fluent, logical and flexible</p> <p>2</p> <p>3 weaknesses are evident</p> <p>4 weaknesses detract</p> <p>5</p> <p>6 incoherent</p>	<p>too long 750–1000 words</p> <p>too short 400–500 words</p> <p>far too long > 1000 words</p> <p>far too short < 400 words</p>	

Selected student responses

The responses to the 2013 WT 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 of the WT 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

Tribute to an Unknown Soldier is a reflective piece. As the narrator visits the grave of Tim, someone who has been close, s/he is drawn instead to another grave, the grave of the Unknown Soldier and then speculates on the life and death of this person. It is interesting that, just as the soldier remains unknown to the narrator, both Tim and the narrator remain unknown to the reader. The mood is consistently calm and pensive.

Response 2

Discovery: the Purpose of Science is an exposition, written as a media article. Using the pseudonym of Pat Kuttir, the writer examines some of the scientific and technological discoveries and developments of the past, suggests future possibilities and marvels at those who explore the unknown.

Response 3

An Elemental Influence is an expository media article which comments on the influence of the stories of Sherlock Holmes. The journalist, in this case, a fictional Louise Lea, explains the continuing popularity of this hero of crime fiction as epitomising the human craving for an answer, 'the most precious thing imaginable' and something that provides a sense of stability in real life as well as fiction.

Response 4

Society's Fear of the Unknown: Asylum Seekers is a persuasive discussion, encouraging Australian citizens to welcome, rather than fear, those who see this country as a place of refuge and who may be unknown to us. The writer points out that Australia has a responsibility to uphold the policies of the United Nations, one of which is that all have the right to seek asylum from harm. The writer urges individual Australian citizens to show empathy and hospitality to those who come to our country.

Response 5

Astra Nullius is a biography. The writer recounts the story of Marion Kestrel who, from childhood, has longed to be amongst the stars and who grows up to become the captain of a galactic vessel which has been prepared for space exploration. Marion speculates on what may be there and especially, on what life might exist. Finally, she achieves her dream, to embark on the investigation of a part of the galaxy, 'to know the unknown' and compares the familiarity of her own 'kingdom' with the unknown that lies before her as she does so.

Response 6

The Charm of Mystery is a personal reflection. The response connects to *things unknown* as well as stimulus piece 13 and to a lesser extent, stimulus piece 5 when dwelling on the childhood pleasures of exploring the mysteries of worlds created in literature. The writer then discusses, with some regret, the effects of learning to read critically and laments the way the early sense of wonder in reading is lost as one learns to deconstruct and analyse texts, as part of 'education'.

Did the unknown soldier breathe in the scent of gunpowder and wonder whether each shot would condemn him a murderer? Did he think about the friends he had lost, and the brothers he had gained? Did he lie awake at night, tossing and turning but unable to ~~des~~ escape the ~~horrible~~ horrible nightmare he was living in? We will never know.

I imagine his family, sitting together by the fire in the bleakest of winters, reading and re-reading his letters to warm their anxious hearts. I imagine the family, when the letters stop^{ped}, but no telegram ~~death~~^{deat} the final blow. They are kept in suspense. They do not know where their son is. A picture comes to me of a lonely mother, a cloud of prematurely white hair floating on her shoulders, and tears filling the furrows by her eyes. She prays, hopes, and cries, but an answer never comes. I imagine myself in her situation. # hurts.

I think of the soldier before he left, dancing to Bing Crosby, and Louis Armstrong's "Hot Five" with the girl he was going steady with. I imagine him clasping her portrait to his chest, whispering to ~~it~~^{it} and pretending she could hear. I imagine the portrait ^{and his deat} lying discarded in a pool of blood, as his body is carried ^{further} away from all he loves.

~~There~~ I will never know how he died - whether from a broken heart, a bullet or a napalm attack. When he died, was his loss greeted with the gentle strains of "Butterfield's Lullaby" or ~~was~~ were the whistles of bombs his ~~only~~ ^{only} farewell? I will never know whether he died ~~in~~ in the war zone, or from immense trauma in a pristine white hospital. Unknown. He is unknown.

~~I think back on all those times where I scoured the hospitals, desperate to hear about Tim from a fellow soldier. I remember finding him, and ^{having} my emotions in such a tumultuous flutter that I didn't know whether to laugh and dance for joy of finding him or to cry over the extent of his wounds. ~~I remember when they told me he ^{had} died during the night. They couldn't prevent it. Was the~~~~

I think of the unknown soldier and my heart almost breaks. This valiant young man gave up everything ~~he had~~ to serve his country, and ~~then~~ ^{was} repayed with ^{only} a small lump of land ~~in~~ ~~which~~ ~~he~~ ~~to~~ hold his cold corpse. I walk slowly back to the cross and bend down. This soldier deserves more respect and care. As a tribute to him, and all soldiers ~~to~~ like him, I ~~begin~~ begin to ~~clearly~~ clear away the years of ~~disarray~~ with my sleeve. When ~~from~~ the cross is looking less dingy, I begin to pluck out the

needs surrounding the grave. I lay my
~~pale ~~my~~ chrysanthemums~~ at the foot of the
grave ~~as a gift~~ and cherish this bitter-sweet
feeling. Finally, in lieu of an inscription,
I ~~write a brief note of thanks on a piece of~~
~~paper~~ I grab a piece of paper from my jacket
pocket and pen a brief note of thanks to show
that ~~the~~ ^{this} sacrifice was not ungratefully received.
"Dolce et decorum est pro patria mori."

Today, I leave the ~~graveyard~~ ^{graveyard} with a
slower pace and a heavier heart. As I
meander through the gilded arches, I realise
that I am still holding my flowers. Seized
with an idea, I walk back to the
Unknown grave, and gently place ~~my~~ ^{the} pale
~~my~~ chrysanthemums at the foot. I smile. ~~My~~
~~gift is a sign that~~ Although this soldier
is unknown, he is not unloved.

DISCOVERY: THE PURPOSE OF SCIENCE.

Over the past hundred years, mankind has made extraordinary technological leaps. Pat Kuttir explores the value of scientific knowledge, which is the key characteristic that makes ours a unique species.

Our journey through the technological ages has been simply astounding. It's hard to believe that a mere thousand years ago, we were stuck in the early metal ages. Today, thanks to amazing advances in technology, our quality of life is enviable indeed. Humans live in developed cities, bustling metropolises filled with technological wonder. ~~used to be~~ ~~powered by~~ Nuclear stations ~~which~~ ^{equivalent} cleanly and efficiently generate the ~~big~~ energy of millions of bulbs, making it hard to fathom that our great-grandfathers studied by candlelight. Disease, which was ^{once} rampant, is today relatively unheard of. Motor vehicles such as cars and trains facilitate swift and speedy travel for the masses.

The advent of ~~the~~ aeroplanes, three-hundred-tonne behemoths which lift effortlessly into the skies, means that no two cities are further than twenty-four hours apart. To put these advances in perspective, just two centuries ago, such a trip would have taken years.

To whom ~~do~~ do we owe these marvellous leaps in our standard of living? ^{Henry Ford,} Edison, Tesla, the Wright brothers; all scientists who strived to apply their discoveries to practical applications. Simply put, science has made our world smaller, but ^{at the same time} it has allowed us to realise ~~that~~ the true size of our universe and the mysteries that it still holds. For centuries, scientists, philosophers and mathematicians have endeavoured to explain and interpret

the unknown; this is the fundamental purpose of all science. Yet, for all our epiphanic discoveries, there remains so much that we don't understand and cannot explain. Questions that ^{appear simple} continue to leave even experts baffled. What exactly is sleep? Where did life on Earth come from? Could we ever grow replacement organs? Will teleportation one day become a reality?

Some of these concepts may appear far-fetched to the average reader; however it is important to bear in mind the rate of scientific progress over the past few decades and centuries. Science and the unknown are intertwined like lovers; a complex, symbiotic relationship on a cosmic scale. Einstein, one of the greatest twentieth-century scientists, summed this up superbly with his belief that mystery, which is the beginning of all true science, is the most beautiful experience. If knowledge is power, as the saying goes, then it follows that the unknown represents a wealth of power waiting to be discovered and tapped into. Therein lies the wonder of scientific knowledge: each day brings the potential for a new discovery, another step forward in our understanding of any given concept and its relevance to the world around us.

Why is this so significant? Many do not appreciate the intrinsic joy and satisfaction that a breakthrough brings a scientist. Having bravely accepted the challenges posed by unanswered questions, and often persevering in the face of countless setbacks and failed experiments, scientists relentlessly pursue the wealth of knowledge which lies just within their grasp, a charm ^{of pursuit} known only to them.

So, the question is not 'What is the unknown?' but 'How fast?

AN ELEMENTAL INFLUENCE

Is the continuing popularity of Sherlock Holmes simply due to the suspense and intrigue his mysteries provide, or does his seemingly eternal influence run deeper? Louise Lea investigates.

No doubt you've heard of Sherlock Holmes. You know, the mystery-solving, action-loving amateur sleuth, widely believed to be one of crime fiction's most valuable assets. His creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, skyrocketed to fame when he published his accounts of Holmes and his companion, John Watson, shedding a light on some of the most baffling fictional cases ever recorded against the backdrop of a somewhat dreary, late-1800s London.

At first glance, there is no reason why Holmes should still be as well-known today as he was a century ago. There is no reason that two popular TV shows - adaptations of his extraordinary sleuthing jaunts - should be currently gracing our screens. Or is there? Are Doyle's tales more than merely brief samples of narrative intrigue? Can they offer us something more?

Undoubtedly so, considering the relentless curiosity of humanity. After all, we have the need to know everything. When we don't - which is most of the time - we feel lost, confused, hard done by. We hate darkness, both literal and figurative, and for most of us it is synonymous with horror, with fear, with monsters under the bed. As a result, we crave the beautiful, blinding light of clarity that good answers bring. What clearer answers could we obtain than those laid out for us at the end of one of Holmes' cases? Short and simple, they quench our thirst for things unknown at least temporarily.

This final revelation, an essential part of the predictable template of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, is not the only thing that draws us in. Each story oozes suspense and allows us to invest in a juicy crime that we personally do not have to solve. Unlike those present in our own lives, Holmes' problems are guaranteed a solution. We know the big reveal is coming and so we can savour the journey by cheering Holmes on, chuckling at Watson's unhelpfulness, rolling our eyes at the 'official' police inspectors. Each tale offers stability and control; things that, in the chaos of everyday life, many of us lack.

Free from the pressure we so often face, we experience almost tangible relief during the eventual resolution, as well as a warm reassurance that what was so craftily hidden from us is now, finally, in plain sight. It's a pat on the back of sorts, a realisation that though we don't know it all we do, at least, know this much.

The influence of Sherlock Holmes does not end there. It's impossible to encounter this fictional mastermind without envying his incredible skills of deduction. Subtly, almost unnoticeably, his talents start to weave their way into the tapestry of our own lives. Our questions start with 'how?' instead of 'why?'. A new generation of detectives is born, and as the fire of our curiosity rages endlessly on we set about solving our own mysteries. This is a true testament to the timelessness of Sherlock Holmes.

Such is the surprising impact of a fictional 110-year-old deductionist. By providing the means, Holmes also gives us a way—a way to battle our own way through the boggy quagmire of our countless questions. It's undeniable that the classic tales of Sherlock Holmes and his good old sidekick Watson give us more than a quickly forgotten flash of entertainment. In this troubling world of ours, full of eternal mysteries, they furnish us with the most precious thing imaginable—answers.

Response 4

SOCIETY'S FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN: ASYLUM SEEKERS

Just like an elephant who fears the mouse that poses him no threat, Australian society fears the most damaged people on Earth. Our country is experiencing an ethical crisis. Current Australian policy promotes the objectification of asylum seekers and reinforces white hegemony as a result of society's fear of the unknown. Individuals around the globe seek asylum in another country when they feel that their own country is impeding on their human rights. Less than one week from the Australian Federal Election, Australian citizens are bombarded with refugee propaganda characteristic of white supremacist values. In order to reduce irrational societal prejudices and improve the safe immersion of asylum seekers, drastic educational and political action needs to be taken. This will ensure that our country upholds an admirable moral code in this fast-paced world.

Asylum seekers exist because of the imbalance and abuse of power around the world. Billions of humans live in conditions that are vastly inconducive to a safe, dignified, and healthy life. These circumstances may include superimposed and torturous regimes, inter- and intra-country war, racial tension, and stark lack of essential resources. To most Australians, especially the highly paid politicians and legislators, these conditions are incomprehensible. A Canadian youth once posed the question to her government: "Why is it that those who have everything are willing to give nothing and those who have nothing are willing to give everything?" Of course this is an exaggerated generalisation, yet the point stands. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for humans to empathise and understand a situation which they have never experienced.

Leading up to the Australian Federal Election, citizens are being slammed with slogans and propoganda regarding asylum seekers. Undoubtedly the most infamous catch phrase of coalition leader, Tony Abbott is, "Stop the boats!" The current situation for asylum seekers in Australia is years of detainment in detention centres - an environment so poor that it aims to encourage refugees to return to their own country. The objectification and impersonalization of refugees can be observed ^{directly} through the current Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd's actions. Rudd and the Labour party vowed that refugees who came to Australia via boat would never be settled in this country. Instead, the Prime Minister would facilitate the permanent settlement of asylum seekers in Papua New Guinea - a country known for its extreme political instability and high risk of racial crimes, gang attacks, and oppression of women. Current Australian policy dehumanizes asylum seekers because leaders of this wealthy country are unfamiliar and unable to empathise with the cruel reality that many refugees experience.

Immediate action needs to be taken to break down walls of racism in Australia and improve the immersion of Asylum seekers into this country. The Dalai Lama preaches the message that all religions, stripped back, endorse the same values. To eradicate ingrained prejudice, it is essential that the general public be educated with respect to the most prominent cultures and religions around the world. Furthermore, the Australian government needs to devote increased efforts and funds to improving the accessibility of legitimate Australian visas and safely transporting refugees via plane. In order to improve the quality of life for settled asylum seekers, it is strongly encouraged that education bridging programs and housing initiatives be maintained and expanded. All the while, it is imperative that

the general public be made aware of the reality through media outlets with the aim of reducing a societal fear of the unknown.

In a world of rapid progression and desensitization via technology, it is of primary importance that individuals encourage their leaders to uphold a fair and just moral code for the country.

As a member of the United Nations, Australia has a responsibility to observe the right of each human to seek asylum.

Thus, it can be seen that current Australian policy regarding asylum seekers reinforces white hegemony and the dehumanization of refugees. These anachronistic values are fuelled by society's fear of the unknown – an inability to comprehend and empathise with asylum seekers and the severe hardships that they endure. In order to maintain an admirable moral code, it is essential that the Australian people take immediate educational and political action to eradicate racism and facilitate the immersion of asylum seekers into this country.

Response 5

ASTRA NULLIUS

As a child, she had looked up at the stars – those little balls of light, so magnificent and far – hanging in the skies. She did not view them as strange, foreign things – no, they were her friends. They called to her – “Come, come, come away!”. They were a guide in the darkness. They were an inspiration.

Life went on, and years rolled by, yet she had never ceased looking. Hoping. Yearning. She wished to explore those stars, just as so many others in the Galactic Naval Fleets had. She had watched the great frigates and dreadnaughts take flight, and disappear in a streak of red that seemed to tear the sky in half. One day... she thought. One day, I'll be a captain. I'll see it all.

It was when Marion Kestrel turned eighteen that she enlisted in the Galactic Naval Fleets. She trained with dozens of other recruits. For the first time in her life, Marion finally found herself on the path to her goal. It was a dream come true – even the burn of her muscles after drills, the ache of her fingers from firearms training, and the way her mind was challenged in strategies... each hurt was a badge of honour; every day passed, another step.

Deep brown eyes gazed out at the vastness of the nebula before her. Colours more vivid than anything she had ever seen twisted and floated, like silk suspended in the air, or ink in water. This unknown space was, if anything, truly incredible to behold. Six years had passed since the day Marion Kestrel had graduated from the academy – with hundreds of missions – great and small – recorded in her service history. As she had always aspired to be, Marion was now Captain Kestrel; her ship – the *GNFV-ALPINE* – was a great and powerful vessel. It was equipped not only to explore the unknown regions of space, but outfitted just as adequately for Combat.

They had been drifting through the stars for quite some time. Galactic Naval Fleet command had chosen the ALPINE to begin a scouting mission into a newly discovered region of space. In truth, Captain Kestrel hated going in blind - the finicky pocket of space seemed to give the ALPINE's scanners false readings... almost as if the unexplored nebula coaxed them forth, to survey it for themselves. There was always great risk in being the first to set foot in the enigmatic abyss of new and unknown space, though Marion Kestrel was not one to balk to fear.

Staring out at the enthralling display of colours and light, Kestrel wondered what lay beyond the confines of the ship's hull - what was hidden in the distant planets of the solar system. Incredibly, the region's sun seemed to blaze in brilliant green - it was a mystery to Kestrel just how such a thing came to be. The science teams aboard the ALPINE would be able to tell her - but she had no wish to seek them out and learn of the properties of such a sun; rather, what lived beneath it. What life it sustained.

Were there others, who stared up at the sky and wondered, just as she had?

A dual-toned beep tore her from her reverie, indicating that someone was waiting outside the door.

"Enter." She spoke, clearing her throat and straightening out her uniform.

The doors automatically slid open to reveal her first officer. Giving a respectful salute, he stepped over the threshold. Kestrel nodded, offering out a chair for him to sit on, which was politely refused.

"Captain," he began. "All systems are at full capacity. We're ready to go."

To that, Marion nodded. Her heart jumped to her throat, hammering incessantly with a mixture of excitement and nerves. She lifted her eyes to meet her first officer's gaze, and saw her own emotions reflected in him.

"Right, then. To the bridge, Number One."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

It took only minutes until Kestrel strode onto the bridge of her ship, greeted by salutes and an announcement of "Captain on deck!" The bridge was her kingdom. It was all things familiar, as opposed to the strangeness of the new space. Captain Kestrel settled herself into the captain's chair, staring out of the huge glass window at the expanse of the unknown before them.

"Initiate thrusters. It's time for us
to know the unknown, crew."

The Charm of Mystery

I always loved reading as a child. When I was growing up I found a sense of wonder and charm when I was drawn into unknown and mysterious worlds crafted by authors. Through reading I could leave my real life behind and spend my days exploring and discovering things in new and wonderful ways. There seemed to be an infinite well of joy and amazement that could only be accessed through literature. There was something special, something unknown, that opened itself to me when I read. That was why I spent most of my childhood with my nose buried in a book and my soul transported to wondrous and mysterious worlds. Unfortunately, from there, things seemed to turn sour.

School was never particularly difficult for me. I was a high achieving student. I excelled in English from day one. Having read from a young age gave me a distinct advantage over my peers. I was placed in advanced reading classes in Primary school and showed an aptitude for writing that carried into Middle and Senior school. However, as we began to study texts in a deeper, more analytical way I found myself harbouring an ill will for schooling which had not presented itself until that moment.

I can't remember exactly when I began to develop the unknown bad taste in my mouth but by tenth grade I had just about stopped reading recreationally altogether. I was no longer devouring novel after novel. Something had changed in me. I blamed it on the work load of school. I told myself that I had no time to read, but I knew that it was a lie. It was not lack of time that had diminished my taste for literature. It was the fact that I could no longer simply enjoy

a book. I found myself deconstructing each text, searching to understand the symbols and metaphors that the authors crafted, rather than simply enjoying them. Because of school, reading had become a chore.

I had lost the sense of wonder and charm I had found in reading as a child. The mystery was gone. and once it was gone it took a long time to find it again. I had to train myself to switch off the part of my brain that had been conditioned to analyse and deconstruct texts. It took years to change my way of thinking without removing the skills I needed for my schooling.

I can understand the need to teach students to read critically. I understand that there are deeper levels to writing, as with all art, that deserve to be explored and discussed. There is an advantage to having a greater understanding of texts. There is, however, a very large and very destructive disadvantage. When those who are taught to read critically can no longer read in any other way, they lose the very heart and purpose of reading. They lose the joy and wonder of being transported from their life into another life. They lose the charm of not quite understanding why a novel can move us in such strange and glorious ways. The pleasure of reading is greatly diminished, if not destroyed completely, when a person takes apart a text. When a student is taught to see the puppet strings the author has tied to them they try to cut them and the emotion is lost. In the end, the thing I learnt most from school is that once you strive to deconstruct and analyse a text, you lose the wonder and charm that comes from the mystery of things unknown.