Retrospective
2014 Queensland Core Skills Test
Writing Task (WT) (Part 3 of 5)
Writing Task (WT)

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

This section describes the 2014 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. Copyright restrictions do not allow the testpaper to be reproduced in this document.

WT 2014 Overall concept: Who cares

Students were required to compose a response that demonstrated a clear connection to the overall concept and to one or more of the stimulus pieces.

The overall concept linking the 14 separate stimulus pieces on the 2014 Writing Task testpaper was Who cares. Given that no punctuation follows, students could take these words to be a genuine question, a statement, or a dismissive retort, thus allowing for a range of approaches. Markers needed to be alert to the possible interpretations of the overall concept as they made their judgments on the criterion of Responsiveness.

If students took Who cares to represent a question, such as 'Who thinks this is important?' or 'Who are the people who are concerned about this?' this interpretation might have led them to identify those who may be genuinely concerned or troubled about issues relating to the world about them or the people in it, and to speculate on why they might care and what might be the results.

Alternatively, students could take the term to be an emotive interjection, an unsympathetic reaction expressing indifference, possibly representing a sentence such as 'I don't care', 'No one cares', or 'It doesn't matter', or even the dismissive 'Whatever'. The words might then be spoken as a flippant throwaway that indicates that the writer or speaker is uninterested or just plain uncaring. Responses resulting from this interpretation focused on negative aspects, based on the premise that people are not as compassionate as they could be, or perhaps should be. Some students used the term in a personal way as a starting point for a piece that indicated their own level of concern about an issue or situation.

Whichever interpretation was used, the overall concept allowed for a wide range of reports on how care and concern can be expressed, expositions and persuasive responses about the existence of or need for care and concern, and narratives, in the form of true or fictional accounts, short stories, or reflections on experiences, personal or observed. The concept gave opportunities to focus on the physical or material aspects of life, such as staying healthy or making a living. It was also used by some to tap into more intangible aspects of the human condition, such as the need for emotional wellbeing and the value of looking and thinking beyond the confines of one's own concerns.

The most successful responses to the Writing Task are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 73). The criteria are: Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); 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 their judgments 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 here 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 resource 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. 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 used only one of the stimulus pieces as a starting point or source of ideas for their responses to the overall concept of the testpaper. The reality is that many, if not most, would have drawn ideas from two or more stimulus pieces. Therefore, the commentary suggests only a narrow view of the possibilities and that there would be a much greater variety in the responses than is mentioned here.

1 Save, restore, destroy?

Students with an interest in history responded to this stimulus piece with questions about the way people view things of the past and how we deal with them. Although the image suggests a focus on physical objects, the words could apply equally to our beliefs and customs. This piece elicited many expository and persuasive discussions.

2 Passion

Although the image makes an obvious connection with music, this did not restrict the scope of responses. A student could focus on any ‘grand enterprise’, ranging from the artistic and cultural to the scientific and technological. Some saw a connection with a personal grand enterprise and used that as the subject matter of a personal recount or reflection. Some turned to past or current world events for accounts of national achievements, military campaigns or social protests. The piece also provided a starting point for short stories or persuasive responses that encouraged readers to share a passion for some grand enterprise.

3 Sticks and stones

This stimulus piece makes a strong link to the overall theme of caring. The original statement seems to suggest that words don’t affect us. The graffitied ‘Really?’ casts doubt on the statement; however, it could also be taken as a veiled threat. The piece prompted short stories and reflections dealing with incidents of violence, personal accounts of being bullied, either verbally or physically, and discussions of the effects on the victims. Some expository or persuasive responses suggested how a victim could or should respond or what measures should be taken by friends, observers or institutions to prevent the practice and help victims (and perpetrators). The piece prompted expositions and reflections on the issues involved.

4 Refusing to buy

This stimulus piece focuses on our patterns of consumption and invites expository responses that discuss the connections between our rampant first-world consumerism and the welfare of those in poorer societies. Some students wrote persuasive responses to convince readers that the consumer can have power in the commercial world or, alternatively, to argue the futility of our individual efforts in the face of powerful commercial interests.

5 Table setting

Responses to this stimulus piece included expositions explaining how a beautiful table setting can complement the food that is served and encourage people to care about what and how they eat. Some students made links with what happens around the family dinner table or with celebratory events such as Christmas dinner or birthday parties. The written text prompted descriptions of the ‘manners’ expected at home or in other places. Some students described the eating practices of different cultures, the art and skill of using chopsticks, or the ‘rules’ around using one’s hands to eat. The current focus on culinary matters reflected in the passionate interest in television programs about food and in the plethora of recipe books available may have provided ideas to exploit, most in expository or persuasive responses. Some students made a connection with other ordinary activities that can be ‘lifted to a higher plane’. Others dismissed such care and attention to the less fundamental aspects of life as unnecessary and frivolous.
6 Future generations

The tongue-in-cheek message of this stimulus piece has a serious edge. It prompted a predominance of expository and persuasive writing. Students who wanted to remind us that we should have a social conscience argued the need to care for the world we live in so that it will remain habitable for future generations. Those who maintain that it is difficult to predict the future suggested that we should simply be pragmatic and stop wasting our time worrying unduly about the unknown and unknowable future.

7 Free society

In 2013 the world farewelled Nelson Mandela, the controversial anti-apartheid revolutionary and politician, elected as president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. The image shows him shaking hands with F W de Klerk, the man who released Mandela from prison and who, as the president immediately before Mandela, paved the way for the end of apartheid and supported the transformation of South Africa into a multi-racial society.

Some students, aware of the impact of these men on events in South African history, gave accounts of their efforts. Those who knew little or nothing about either of them were able to respond to the sentiment of the words from Mandela’s defence at the 1964 Rivonia trial at which he was sentenced to imprisonment for life.

The piece prompted some to write imaginary continuations of the speech that Mandela gave at his trial, or analyses of how far our society has moved towards the ideal expressed in the piece. Others wrote persuasive responses that refer to the current state of our society. Some used the written text as a starting point for a statement of their own personal beliefs. Most responses to this stimulus piece were informative, expository, or reflective.

8 Stop and stare

This stimulus piece suggests a slightly different interpretation of the overall concept and focuses on the need to enjoy the world we live in. It suggests that it is important for us to forget our everyday concerns occasionally and take time out to stop and reflect on what is around us. Most students who responded to this idea agreed with the sentiment and some complained about the frantic pace of their lives in this, their final year of school. It is a piece that was more likely to be used in combination with others than alone.

9 Weapons of mass distraction

The dominant image here of a pile of books is balanced to some extent by the written comment about technology. This stimulus piece provided opportunities both for students who love books to lament their possible disappearance and for students who are absorbed in and delighted by technology to share their enthusiasm. Some suggested ways of achieving a balance. Some students speculated on what new forms of media might be available in the future.

10 Your body

Given the current focus on health in the media, there would be few students who have not thought about some aspect of this topic. Some made a personal response; others saw it as a general reminder for our society and responded accordingly. Responses included advice on how to stay healthy, reports on medical breakthroughs and arguments for and against particular aspects of health care. Some students discussed the balance of physical, emotional, spiritual and environmental factors affecting a person’s health. Some reported on the health and longevity of individuals today and in the past.

11 Friend

This stimulus piece focuses on the extent of our responsibility to those who are dearest to us. It advises that, if we really care for someone, we must be prepared to risk the possibility of upsetting, offending, embarrassing, or even alienating a friend by telling them something we believe they need to know, no matter how unwelcome that may be or how difficult it is for them to face the truth. It suggests that there should be honesty between friends, and that we should not hide the truth from those who are close to us.
This piece provided opportunities for students to respond with short stories, personal accounts and reflections on this difficult situation. It was also the prompt for some to write expositions and persuasive responses focusing on the nature of friendship.

12 Facebook

The words of this stimulus piece prompted responses that discussed the definition of a friend or the role of electronic communication in making friends. Students used the words to begin a story or a reflection that focused on a particular friendship. It prompted some to define and analyse the importance of friends in one's life or the power of technology in the development or destruction of connections or relationships with others.

13 Helping the helpless

This stimulus piece provided ideas for some thoughtful writing from students. It makes a strong statement of opinion followed by a related question that gives a focus for responses. Students may have responded to the statement, to the opinion, or to both. Some analysed and assessed the level of compassion shown in our society; others advised on the most appropriate strategies for improving the lives of the less fortunate amongst us. In the main, it generated expository, argumentative and persuasive writing.

14 Technology

The words of this stimulus piece have been attributed to Albert Einstein. The written text, together with the image of a robot encouraged students to consider our current relationship with technology and to speculate on its potential for the future. The piece prompted some expository and persuasive responses about possible benefits or disasters involving technology. It inspired some students with an interest in science fiction to write short stories or other imaginative responses.

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, 51% of students responded to both visual and written stimulus pieces. An additional 38% responded to only written stimulus pieces and a mere 9% 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 2014, the most popular text type for students was the expository response, with 35% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by imaginative pieces, written by 29% of students. Persuasive responses accounted for 23% of scripts and 13% of responses were reflective. 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.

**Choice of genre**

Within the broader categories 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. They 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 span of time; a media article should have short paragraphs.

As seen in the diagram here, in 2014, ten genres were identified. The most popular genre was the essay, closely followed by the short story. Speeches 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. Students should be encouraged to discover in which genres they write most confidently and competently. This should allow them to produce their best writing.

**Essay**

The definition of the 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 (presenting 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 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 clear resolution and a compelling 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 is significant to the criteria of Central idea and Structuring & sequencing. Many such 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 intended audience.

Media article

This genre includes texts such as feature articles, editorials and journal articles. Predominantly expositional in nature, media articles require students to have a reasonable knowledge of their topic. Therefore, students should carefully consider their own background knowledge and expertise when selecting this approach to respond to their chosen stimulus piece/s. They should also consider the conventions of the genre. For example, feature articles usually 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 knowledge of the specific conventions of the genre, and need to be able to use them to effect.

Report

A small percentage of students chose to write a report. Many of these were scientific, perhaps suggesting that students were aware of the genre 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.

Letter

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.

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.
Achievement in specific criteria

In discussing specific criteria, reference is made to selected student responses which begin on page 75.

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 the judgment of this criterion.

The introductory paragraph of the response Why should I care (see page 75) unequivocally establishes a clear central idea, by claiming that the treatment of asylum seekers is in conflict with the values that underpin Australia’s western liberal democracy. The central idea is developed with a description of the plight of these people and an explanation of the perceived contradiction between government policy and our expressed ideals. The writer suggests that we may think that we care about the matter but that our care is misdirected. This is followed by an explanation of why we should care about asylum seekers, as they can contribute to the richness of life in this country. The article and the argument conclude with a summary of the importance of caring for these people and what that can do, not just for them but for our country and for our desire to uphold the values of freedom and equality of opportunity. The clear statement of the central idea, the economy of its development, and its strong resolution contribute to the effectiveness of this response.

Vocabulary

Many 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, and sometimes, something as simple as using the wrong preposition can destroy the meaning.

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 Who cares Task: Speech (see page 78) showed a grasp of the subject matter and developed an articulate and inspirational speech through careful and controlled use of language, and in particular, through discriminating and precise selection and placement of vocabulary.

The writer could easily have been tempted to use language that is overblown and elaborate but instead, it is straightforward, restrained and formal. There is little repetition of significant words. The right words are chosen to say the right thing in just the right way. One of the many examples of a sentence in which the words are ‘just right’ is the one on page 79, beginning on line 10, with the use of ‘single’, ‘testament’, the dramatic ‘grotesque mistreatment’ and powerful ‘violations of their human rights’. The response also includes some missteps, but these are few. Throughout the response, the vocabulary is appropriate to the subject matter and to the genre of a formal speech intended for what we would assume is an educated audience.

Responsiveness

The piece of writing that a student produces must clearly be a response to the testpaper on the day, showing a connection to both the overall concept and the stimulus piece/s. Therefore, of all the criteria, Responsiveness is the one weighted most heavily. Achievement will suffer where the connection is weak, or where the student responds to either the concept or stimulus, but not to both. The higher 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, *Who cares*, 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 a piece of this kind tends 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 testpaper 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?'

The writer of *The Train* (see page 81) has clearly responded to stimulus piece 8, with its advice that we need to 'have time to stop and stare'. The connection with the overall concept is not explicitly stated. Despite this, the responsiveness of the piece is strong. The focus of the response throughout is clearly on how much the narrator cares about a mobile phone that is not functioning, and the growing realisation that technology forces us to care about something other than the real world in which we live. It is the flat battery in the phone that has provided the opportunity to 'stand and stare'. The narrator realises that the power of the mobile phone to take us beyond our own personal reality comes at a cost, and that in fact, it detaches one from 'what is truly real'. The writer is clearly asking us how much we care or should care about technology and has suggested that we can, and should, begin to care in a different way and about different things.

**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. Proofreading is vital.

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
- absence of apostrophes to identify possession or adding apostrophes to plurals.

The control of language is an important element in the success of *The Librarian* (see page 84). The introductory sentence sets the context with a short, sharp and dramatic statement followed by a dash and a development of the initial three words. It establishes the context, the wintry weather, which suggests the rather depressing situation of the librarian. It also provides a contrast: outside and inside. The librarian and the library are introduced only in the final sentence of the paragraph; until then we know only that there are 'gnarled hands' and that 'Pages turn unceasingly'. The writer is adventurous in the construction of sentences, showing control and an ability to break some of the rules of grammar to good effect. While there is no special value in using particular punctuation marks, the writer uses the semicolon correctly and effectively. There are no spelling mistakes. This is a straightforward and effective piece of writing.

**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 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.

*A Cause for Applause* (see page 87), a letter to a great musician, is structured so that it begins with an expression of gratitude for a wonderful performance, then goes on to describe the effect of the music on the listeners and to reveal that the beauty of the performance has moved the writer to believe that there must be such a thing as a soul. In the persona of ‘Ginette’, the writer follows this with details of the music and its profound effect on her, her feeling of connection with Mr Perlman and her happiness that he has shared his own great love of music with her. She discusses her concern that some people believe that classical music will die but she declares that she has been convinced and reassured by the ‘undeniable passion and poise’ of the musician that it will live on.

The personal letter is a genre in which informal and conversational language is often used, and this can make it difficult for students to demonstrate their ‘best’ writing. In this instance, although the letter is certainly deeply personal, the structural choices in relation to purpose (an expression of gratitude), intended audience (a world-famous artist), and the logical sequence of ideas and images (opinions and beliefs about personal and abstract matters) have allowed the writer to use language that is more formal than that of the usual letter to a friend or relative. This has resulted in a response that effectively demonstrates how well this student can write.

**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.
Writing Task marking guide: Criteria and standards

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution to the holistic grade made by:</th>
<th>Decision about:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL IDEA</td>
<td>VOCABULARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a 1+</td>
<td>the writing demonstrates the deliberate, focused development of a clear, central idea (explicit or implicit).</td>
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<tr>
<td>identifiable for intended audience; direction and resolution revealed</td>
<td>controlled (discriminating, imaginative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifiable but unevenly developed</td>
<td>appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identifiable but poorly developed or not readily identifiable but some development evident</td>
<td>inappropriate, interfering with meaning at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not identifiable</td>
<td>limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too short &lt; 400 words</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Selected student responses

The responses to the 2014 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, students should be aware that legibility 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 these responses cannot do this. They must assess what they see. While there is no specific criterion that applies, it is inevitable that illegible handwriting will affect the judgments that can be made in all the criteria.

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

Response 1

Why should I care? This is intended as a media article. It is a powerful persuasive response whose central idea is an impassioned call for a change in government policy in relation to the treatment of asylum seekers by the government of this country and provides a clear rationale for the proposal.

Response 2

‘Who cares’ Task: Speech. This response is a speech about the life and work of Nelson Mandela. In particular, it focuses on Mandela’s care for justice and truth. In an informative and powerful response, the writer gives an account of his life and work, pointing out the sacrifices he made and the remarkable level of his concern for people, and holding him up as an example of one whose care for others was great enough to overcome any personal feelings of doubt and fear in taking on the work of combating injustice.

Response 3

The Train is a thoughtful first-person account of a train ride by someone, travelling to work, whose mobile phone will not work because the battery is flat. In frustration, the narrator observes other passengers blithely using their own ‘charged, functional phones’. Gradually forced to see and hear the outside world more clearly, the narrator experiences a feeling of peace that comes from not being immersed in the ‘other reality of technology’. As the phone is stowed away, it even seems possible that it may be left at home tomorrow.

Response 4

The Librarian is a simple and evocative description. It provides a picture for us of an elderly man, a librarian, in a quiet and empty library. Outside, the streets are full of busy, noisy people, fully engaged with the activities of their lives and with little time for the books that fill the library. Inside the library, the librarian remembers days gone by, when people young and old filled the library and cared for what it could give them. He reflects on the ‘slow erosion of the love of books’ because of an increasing involvement with electronic devices.

Response 5

A Cause for Applause takes the form of a personal letter to the great violinist, Itzhak Perlman, congratulating him on his musicianship and thanking him for a concert performance. The writer, using the name Ginette, focuses on the reasons for the beauty of the performance, the care with which the violinist has played and the passion that he showed for music. The writer of the letter says she has been uplifted and is now convinced that classical music still has a future.
As a western liberal democracy, Australia has aligned itself with the values of freedom and equality, especially that of equality of opportunity. These notions extend beyond purely our system of government, and should underpin our actions in both domestic and international spheres. However, when examining the topic of asylum seekers, one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics, it is evident that these ideals are being neglected. The Australian public and government are failing to care for the plight of these people, and by extension, are failing to afford them the rights and respect which we have deemed necessary for a democratic state to uphold.

Asylum seekers are undoubtedly some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Fleeing wartorn or oppressive regimes, they travel to countries such as Australia, often on unsafe boats, a testament to their desperation. In many cases the victims of cultural or religious persecution, asylum seekers are motivated by a desire to pursue a better life, and hope to find this in Australia. However, the nation is closing its doors to asylum seekers, indicating that the land of the "young and free" may not be so free after all. Our policy on asylum seekers is hard-line, involving offshore processing and mandatory detention in facilities which have become synonymous with the word ‘atrocities’. This ultimately suggests that Australia does not invest enough care into the plight of asylum seekers, something which is hugely problematic.
When juxtaposing Australia’s ideals as a democratic state, with our asylum seeker policy, an obvious contradiction in rhetoric emerges. Developed nations, including Australia, have identified it their collective duty, as indicated in the United Nations Development Agenda, to use their prosperity and influence to help those less fortunate. Indeed, we see this with the giving of aid, where Australia gave $4.8 billion in 2012. To then prevent asylum seekers from properly entering the country and thus being afforded basic human rights is fundamentally at odds with the country’s moral imperative. It would appear that while we care about this issue, evidenced by the number of weekly headlines about asylum seekers, our concern is misdirected. Indeed, rather than focusing on the fact that all people have a right to life and that Australia is in a prime position to ensure them that, the public, caught up in the hysteria propagated by politicians and the media, would appear to care only about the safety of Australian borders and their own job security. This irrationality exposes that we adopt an egocentric view when examining such issues, and that, put bluntly, we invest our care in the wrong side of the debate.

The question then concerns why we should care about the plight of asylum seekers. The main response stems from our moral obligation as a western liberal democracy to consistently strive to ensure all people are afforded basic freedoms and equality.
domestic lens, however, it can also be argued that Australia can only be enriched by this diversity. Thus, for moral and practical reasons, it is evident that the issue of asylum seekers should be at the forefront of society's consciousness.

Ultimately, more important than simply caring about the issue is ensuring that this compassion is translated into action. For Australian asylum seeker policy to reflect the nation's ideals, it requires radical reappraisal. Combined with raising general awareness to combat ignorance, we can ensure that the values of freedom and equality of opportunity are upheld in all circumstances.
‘Who Cares’ Task: Speech

Nelson Mandela once said: “I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve.” As one of the most iconic and influential figures of the 20th and 21st centuries, Nelson Mandela’s commitment to obtaining the freedom and rights of black South Africans in the brutal, impoverished and oppressive Apartheid regime, is known throughout the world as one of the most significant acts of care for racial equality and justice. His dedication to his goal of an equal and democratic society for his people resulted in his incarceration for twenty-seven years - the ultimate sacrifice for the dream he shared with family, friends and strangers alike. Nelson Mandela’s uncompromising faith in his vision for an equal South Africa, in conjunction with his magnanimity, grace and forgiveness of his former oppressors, showed the world that reconciliation towards former enemies, is the most remarkable and courageous act of care that we as humans can possibly exhibit.

In a world where racism is prominent, sexism and inequality is rife and crime is considered normal, it is easy for us to feel overwhelmed by pain and injustice. Stories and images flood our television screens, presenting us with news reports of terrorism, civil war, police brutality, theft, rape, murder and the abhorrent treatment of people and animals across the globe confront us daily. We can wonder to ourselves; “Why is there so much suffering?” and “There is nothing I can do to change it.” It is difficult for us to imagine facing these challenges, and for us to imagine standing against injustice that is far wider, far bigger
than ourselves. However, we can look to Nelson’s example for courage and for inspiration on how care can be implemented through action, and how the impacts can foster change beyond comprehension. Thoughts about our inability to combat injustice, to conquer what is wrong because we care, can be pervasive and paralysing. But we don’t have to feel useless, and we don’t have to be afraid of failure to cultivate substantial change. We don’t have to fear failing to pursue visions that we care about because of negativity and ‘unbearable’ odds. If any single human is an example for us, is a testament to believing and acting on care, it is Mandela, who cared about the grotesque mistreatment of black South Africans and the violations of their human rights. Just like us, Mandela no doubt faced doubt and fear, the same questions of “Will this ever change?” and “Am I able to help my cause?”. 

Mandela made changes first with himself, just like we can. He joined the local African National Congress party, and became South Africa’s first black lawyer. He took action, working to reclaim the dignity and stolen rights of black South Africans who were facing prejudiced trials before a supremacist white court of law. Mandela’s circumstances were not only oppressive but devoid of hope, in a society where his humanity was degraded and devalued. Despite this, his attitude was one of determination, taking small consistent steps in building support, building a movement. No doubt people would have told him, as they tell us, that he would never be able to change the injustice, that he was a dreamer who could not manifest an equal society, who could not, in the face of apartheid, achieve his vision. However Mandela emerged years later as an
international symbol of the fight for justice, for equality and for peace, and as an icon of enormous faith and courage. Someone so glorified and renowned surely seems almost super-human, but Mandela was as capable of being a leader of care as any one of us are. In the same way that he saw opportunity in people hopelessness, so too can we. We can educate ourselves, our friends, our families on racism, discrimination, sexism and on issues that we care about. The responsibility falls to us to voice our concerns, to be a voice for what we care for. Because each of us is capable of believing in change. We saw through Nelson Mandela’s lifelong struggle to achieve equality in South Africa, that the road is long and that perfection is not possible — but that improvement is always achievable, that injustices can be righted, that our world can be cared for in simple ways by each and every one of us, contributing to a global effort. Mandela, more than many, knew that ideas can change the world. I encourage you all to believe in this too, because ideas truly can change the world as we have seen, but only if we are brave enough to pursue them.
The Train

Tap, tap. Swipe. Tap. As I scroll aimlessly through my Facebook newsfeed, the train slows to a halt. I look up: not my stop. Just as I glance back down at my phone where it sits in my lap, it gives a final, apologetic beep and the screen abruptly goes black. Dead.

The train starts moving again, and I sigh, stuffing the device into my warm backpack, resigned to boredom. There goes my tripe entertainment, a whole world closed to me by virtue of a dead battery.

Listlessly, I glance around at the five other passengers in the cab with me. Three are on their phones. Their charged, functional phones. Of the other two, one seems to be gazing vacantly out the window, music clamouring faintly from his earphones, and the other picks meticulously at her chipped nail polish.

I tangle my fingers, schooling myself to patience: the train will reach my stop in no time. Still, I fidget a bit and cast my gaze out the window. For a fraction of a second, flying marvelously blurry colours are all I see. the outside world momentarily smeared across the glass. Before long, my eyes refocus and I can see the world streaming by, trees and buildings and industrial flotsam all whipping past at steady incredible speeds. Quite beautiful, really, yet after a few minutes the sheer monotony of it bores me. Ah, well.

I close my eyes and listen to the small sounds around me: the constant ambient whirring and random clanking of the train, the coarse brush of fabric against fabric as a passenger shifts in their seat, a muffled cough from someone somewhere behind me.

I itch to delve once more into the other world within my phone, and pull the battered device from where it rests in the
bottom of my pack. I tap uselessly at the blank screen, futilely press buttons, and even shake the damn thing, as if that might miraculously make it work. Once again, I sigh in frustration and slip the dead thing back into my bag on the seat beside me.

The man sitting across from me taps away at his phone, a soft smile on his lips. I wonder what makes him smile like that: if, even in the relative quiet of the carriage, he reaches out and talks to someone, someone.

I wrinkle my nose slightly: his cologne is quite pungent. Honestly, it smells more like gasoline than anything else. I wonder if he can breathe.

Apparently so, for he still taps and swipes at the tiny screen before him, no doubt finding a kind of fulfillment there in that I myself know only too well. The strange, almost abstract sense of self, the transcendent sense of community one can find in such a tiny piece of technology is astounding. Branching out beyond one’s own personal reality like that, well, it’s a heady thing indeed.

Sometimes, I almost get lost in it. Such branching out, such massive exchanges of information and communication: it’s an amazing thing. Yet, even as I look around this utterly mundane train carriage, I can see the price that is paid for this allemande reality and abstract consciousness we find in technology. The price paid for this tiny, yet in finicky broad and encompassing reality. We are each contained within it, partially detached from what is truly real. I don’t doubt that everyone on this train experiences that regularly.

It’s not that I think we’d all be amiably chatting away were it not for our electronics. I know we wouldn’t. But maybe, just maybe, we’d take part in our own realities a bit more, focus on the flying colors and see our lives in detail, for
once.

A tinny, formal voice announces my upcoming stop. I gather my things as the brakes begin to whine. Looking around at the quiet cab, I almost feel at peace.

The black screen of my phone glints up at me from within my backpack, blessedly blank. Standing, ready to depart, I breathe deeply, despite the overpowering cologne permeating the air, and zip my bag, hiding the device.

Perhaps, tomorrow, I won't even bring it.
The librarian

It's cold outside - the type of weather that sinks deep into your flesh and bones, rips at the surface of your skin and fingers even in the warmest fireplace. Yet in the dark shadows, in the flickering light of a yellowed candle, gnarled hands reach lovingly, rubbing with absolute familiarity against worn tomes; they are calloused yet gentle. Pages turn unceasingly, as do the hands of the old grandfather clock, worn and faithful - a duty of almost twenty years. Hours pass, and the librarian lays down his book gently, and with great care, lifts himself out of the armchair, receding into the warm darkness of his abode for the night.

The next morning comes; cool and crisp, the library is open. The librarian waits at his desk, fingers again caressing novels, anthologies, magazines and almanacs; steady hands lovingly placing them into ordered piles. Inside, it is warm, just the librarian and his multitude of books; voices immortalised in paper and ink - voices long gone. Outside, there is a sea of people, teeming with all varieties of life - teenagers, hands hooked in pockets and hunched over their phones, women in large groups, babbling excitedly over the top of each other (like a flock of sheep) about the latest gossip, fashion and celebrity news, business men, all frowns and grimaces, sending menacing glares at any unfortunate pedestrian foolish enough to interrupt their paths, cooing into their phones angrily, select phrases such as "Get him on the damn phone with me!" and "I want those figures by Monday!" filtering into the library like sunlight streaming through the high, slotted windows. So many people, their footsteps
constantly passing the weathered door of the library, uncaring, 
attentions yielded to the more attractive, saccharine pleasures-
distractions - of every day life, yet none with the time for
the simplicity of paper and ink. 

Yet, as the librarian recalls with a fond smile, it wasn’t 
always like this. He remembers a different group of
people entirely, treading through the tall bookshelves, stacked
high with novels of all kinds. Different steps for different
people. The children, eager steps, running towards the
childress books, glossy and vibrant in the sunlight.
The adults, gliding quietly through towers of mystery,
romances, Shakespeare, Dickens, Poe and Tolstoy.
The students, serious academics, striding purposefully,
the less serious with a more aimless step, roaming casually
through the piles of information. It mattered not to the
librarian who his frequenteres were, all that mattered to
him was that they had cared, had understood.

Years passed and the numbers, the people, dwindled, lost
to televisions, phones and the internet, left just the
librarian, alone in the stacks. A lone man, 
solitary in the care he had displayed to the art of the
written word, seemingly appearing to be shrunken, diminutive
and dwarfed in comparision to the tall bookshelves, now dusty
with age and misuse. A man at odds with the world
around him, in contrast to the people outside, uncaring
and mechanical.

Lost in a world uncaring about the written word, the joy
of physically holding the thoughts and emotions of another
person, their legacy, the library librarian knew.
observed, over the years, the slow erosion of the love of books, replaced by television and video games. Now only he remains, like a wizened memorial to an age gone by.
Response 5

A Cause for Applause

22 January 2015

Dear Mr Perlman,

Congratulations on a delightful performance the other night. I feel honoured to have been able to experience your evident joy of making music. Might I add, your program was skilfully selected - the Bach Chaconne, followed by a passionate rendition of Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto - what more could one want!

I have been to many classical concerts before, yet these concerts seem incomparable to yours. Mr Perlman, before you even placed bow upon string, everyone in the concert hall had a smile on their face - children, teenagers and the elderly. And then you began to play. However, I am sure that all members of the audience would agree that you did more than just play the notes on the manuscript. Indeed, your playing seemed as though you were singing from your heart. Up until last night, I did not believe there was such thing as a 'soul'. Now I am convinced there is, for how else could your performance have been so moving, so soulful.

Despite the length of the Chaconne, it felt like the masterpiece was finished before you had even commenced. It was as though every note you played was performed for me alone. And, although I was seated high up in the balcony, my body was enveloped in your warm and strikingly heartfelt tone. As you lingered on the final cadence, I realized tears were running down my face like a waterfall. Then, I looked up and saw your face, Mr Perlman, was tear-stained also. Never did I
I think that music had the power to convey such emotion alone, let alone the power to connect individuals on such an intimate level.

Concluding your fine program, you performed, with great flair, the romantic Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. At times I was crying, laughing, and then crying again—how you managed that is beyond me! Even when your fingers were dancing in a blur all over your violin, you took the care to fill every note with passion, sorrow or excitement. By Perlman, when you finished playing, you could not stop smiling, and neither could the audience. Regardless of my arthritis, I joined in the seemingly never ending applause. You obviously thoroughly enjoy the art of music-making and I am so pleased that you were able to share that love with me the other night.

Mr. Perlman, for many years I have been repeatedly told that classical music is a "dying art," which concerns me greatly. However, after witnessing you perform, my concerns have dissipated. You played from your heart and with undeniable passion and poise. And, because you evidently cared so much about the music, I felt like I formed a unique connection with you. Additionally, when I looked around the concert hall during your performance, even the youth were mesmerized by your playing. I would therefore like to thank you, Mr. Perlman. Not only did you produce a stunning performance but, most importantly, you have instilled faith into me that classical music does have a future in modern society. As long as this world has people like you that genuinely take pleasure in sharing their music-making, I do
not see how classical music can cease to be.

I look forward to seeing you perform again.

Sincerely,

Ginette