

Retrospective

2015 Queensland Core Skills Test

Writing Task (WT) (Part 3 of 5)



For all Queensland schools

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Manager
Publishing Unit
Email: publishing@qcaa.qld.edu.au

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 2015 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 2015 Overall concept: *What feeds us*

The overall concept linking the 13 separate stimulus pieces on the 2015 Writing Task testpaper was ***What feeds us***. The concept allows for a range of possible interpretations. Markers needed to be alert to the possible interpretations of the overall concept as they made their judgments on the criterion of Responsiveness.

Students were free to deal with the term 'feeds' literally, that is, what it is that actually provides food for all or for oneself. Equally acceptable were the many metaphorical ways in which students might interpret the word. These include: drives us, in the sense of competing or winning; gives meaning to our lives; makes it possible for us to thrive or flourish, or spurs us on, gives us purpose, and fulfils us spiritually. Students interpreted the word 'us' in the overall concept from personalising it to refer to oneself or an individual, to expanding on it to refer to a group, a community, society or all of humanity. Some of the contexts that students chose for their responses included: self-actualisation, for example, by considering what can drive us to be what we really want to be; responding to a need, or desire, or deficiency; and ambition, for example, by focusing on what spurs us to the heights.

Whichever interpretation was chosen, the overall concept allowed for a range of responses in a variety of text types: expository, imaginative, persuasive and reflective. Students also managed to produce creditable responses in a variety of genres. These ranged from a straightforward kitchen recipe, to a newspaper editorial, to a media interview, to a personal reminiscence or recount.

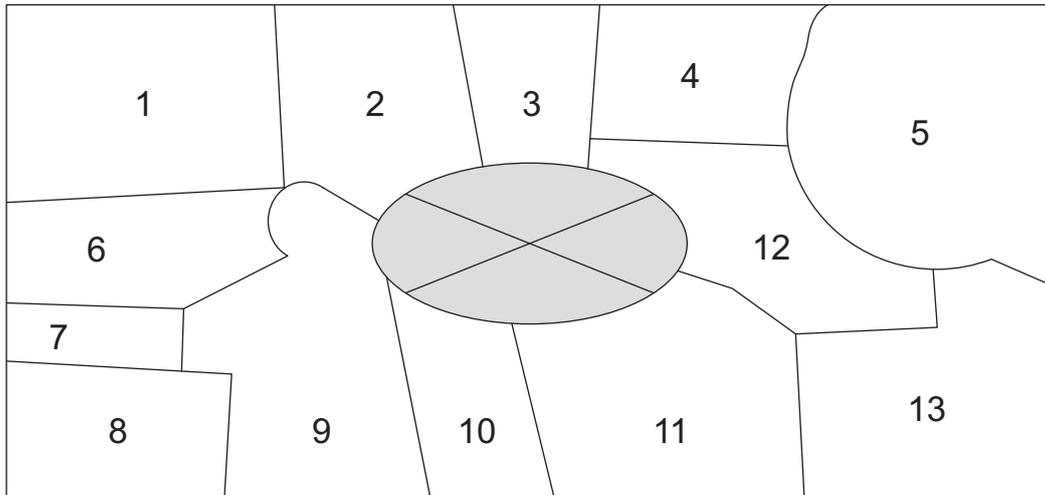
The most successful responses to the Writing Task are those that demonstrate higher achievement in the criteria identified in the marking guide (page 68). The criteria are: Central idea (CI); Vocabulary (V); Responsiveness (R); Grammar, punctuation, spelling (GPS); Structuring & sequencing (SS); and Length (L).

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

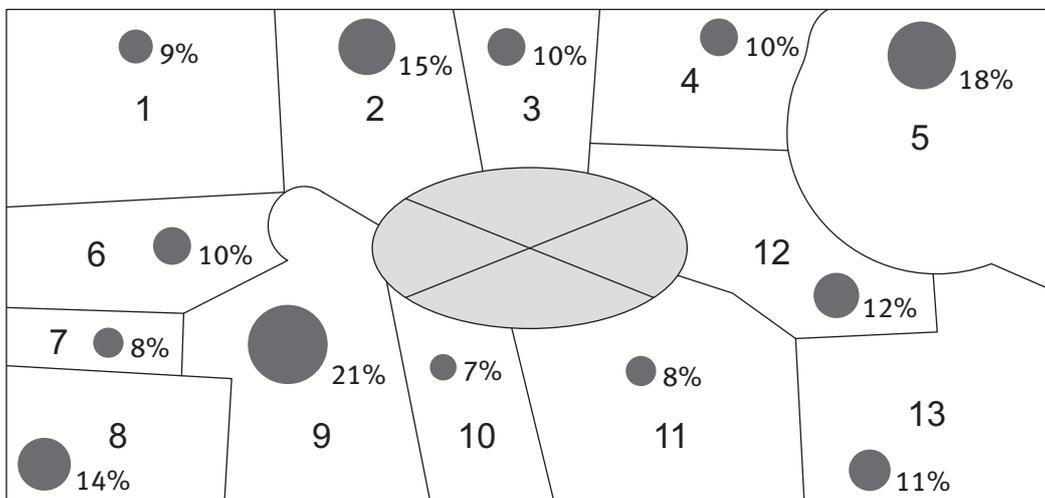
Diagram of the testpaper

The testpaper includes 13 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

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 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 *Ingredients*

The written text in this stimulus piece suggests an explanation for the composition and development of a human being. The image accompanying the text reinforces the idea that what each of us becomes will be a composite of the characteristics we have inherited from our ancestors, together with the effects of our experiences. Responses to the ideas in this piece elicited biographical or autobiographical accounts, reflections on personality and analyses of the deliberate development of character. Responses also included expositions on the evolution of living creatures and the biology of humans. Some students, who knew enough about the nature/nurture debate, developed a discussion or a persuasive response on this subject. The stimulus piece prompted both factual and imaginative pieces.

2 *Greed*

As a rule, greed is not looked on very favourably. In the Christian faith, greed is regarded as one of the seven deadly sins; for Buddhists it is one of the three ‘poisons’; Hindus believe that greed is not acceptable; Islam views greed as something that leads to evil. However, in this stimulus piece, the words appear to praise greed. The speaker, the character Gordon Gekko in the 1987 movie, *Wall Street*, points out that he refers to greed ‘for lack of a better word’. When he explains the kind of greed he is referring to, we realise that it is perhaps not what we usually think of as greed. Gekko lists some of the human hungers and desires that he claims have led to what he calls ‘the upward surge of humanity’.

There were saw many persuasive pieces written in response to this stimulus piece. Some students provided a synonym — the ‘better word’ that Gekko was searching for. These students argued that this kind of greed is necessary if humans are to gain greater knowledge, become happy people and make the world a better place. There were also reflections and stories that illustrated this kind of greed in practice.

3 *Scientific discoveries*

This stimulus piece provided opportunities for students interested in science and technology to share their knowledge. Some have seen, and in some cases used, a blood glucose monitor like the one shown. It was evident that some had personal knowledge and experience of diabetes and other significant illnesses. Although this stimulus piece prompted some to write expositions, it also provided a starting point for personal and reflective responses, and narratives, factual or imaginative, in which the writers focused on our dependence on scientific and technological developments for our survival and for many improvements in the quality of our lives.

4 *Maslow*

Although Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs may not be well known to all students, the simple diagram provided was clear and informative enough for them to use it as a source of ideas for their writing. Responses included reports, analytical expositions, reflective and imaginative pieces that used the contents of the diagram to explore the ways in which these needs motivate us and contribute to our wellbeing.

5 Joy

The written text in this stimulus piece and its accompanying images are clear and strong. They tell us that what we want most in life is joy. The images of activities and experiences suggest that life is an adventure, prompting some students to write about their own memories of the travel and leisure activities that have been adventures for them and that have fed their need for joy in life. Some students analysed the nature of that joy and why we need it. For others, the images prompted short stories and other imaginative texts that focused on what brings joy to people.

6 Food for the soul

This stimulus piece makes a clear and simple statement, one that prompted some students to respond with expositions on how music feeds us by enriching our lives. There were descriptions of favourite music and expositions about the work of certain composers or artists. The image of the concert ticket prompted some to describe a real or fictional concert or music festival. Some students explained their reasons for enjoying a particular style of music. Others shared their own experiences of performance. Imaginative responses included fictional reflections and accounts by a musician like the one shown on the concert ticket.

7 Faith

Faith is a word for trust in someone or something. This can be trust in a person, a principle, a community, an institution, the universe as a whole, or in oneself. Such trust or confidence, whether or not it is rational, can support a belief in the ability to achieve a goal and this can increase the power to do so. Responses to the stimulus piece included expositions that explored the nature of faith, and persuasive texts on the benefits or dangers of faith. There were real and fictional reflections on, or accounts of, the influence and effects of faith on human action.

8 Just food

The image in this stimulus piece is emotive. The tiny chick held in someone's hands suggests the fragility of life and draws attention to human connections with other creatures. The juxtaposition of the delicacy of this image with the cynicism of the blunt question, 'It's just food, isn't it?' is confronting. This led some students to recognise an ethical dilemma that we face in using other creatures for food. Some chose to respond to this stimulus piece with expositions or persuasive texts. Others personalised the situation in reflections or imaginative texts such as short stories.

9 Bite and chew

The familiar warning, 'Don't bite off more than you can chew' has clear connections with the idea of greed. It gives advice not to overreach, but rather, to be moderate about ambitions. This is turned on its head by the advice in this stimulus piece to bite off as much as you possibly can and then 'chew like mad'. This suggests that one should be aggressive and enthusiastic in going after what it is that is wanted. It praises ambition and hunger for achievement. The sporting image that accompanies the words suggests competition. The stimulus piece exhorts us to be ambitious, work hard and aim for success. Some students used the field of competitive sport as the context for persuasive and expository pieces. Some wrote personal accounts of their successes and failures, in all sorts of areas. Some responded in biographical accounts of achievers in history. Of course, the ideas here also provided inspiration for a range of stories of action and endeavour.

10 Plain old conversation

This stimulus piece, with its image of a message on a phone, prompted responses that focused on the role of electronic communication in making and keeping friends. For those who agreed with the written statement, it provided ideas for persuasive pieces about the value of communication in friendships, and also, the pleasure of talking face to face with friends. Students used the words to begin a story or reflection focusing on a particular friendship. This piece provided a starting point for expositions that analysed the importance of having friends or persuasive pieces that assessed the power of technology in the development or destruction

of connections and relationships with others. The words and the image provided ideas for stories and other fictional pieces that featured conversations.

11 *Without art*

Like the previous stimulus piece, this one comments on the value of intangible elements in life. This time, there is a reminder of the importance of art in making life more palatable. An artist is shown, surrounded by the devastation caused by war as he sits in a trench and draws. There is no indication of which is more important, creating art or viewing art. The message is just that art is essential. It is clear that art can comment on or can suggest alternatives to some of the realities of life. This piece prompted persuasive and expository responses in which students supported the statement with examples of works of art of all kinds that lift the spirit and made people appreciate the fact that they are alive. Some students chose to tell the story of the man shown in the picture and some told the story of finding the drawing.

12 *Hungry*

The focus of this stimulus piece is the basic need for food, drink and shelter. While the quote from the Book of Matthew in the Bible is a simple statement, the emotion communicated is one of gratitude. This is especially implied in the words, 'you welcomed me'. This piece was used in many ways, as material for short stories, accounts and personal reflections on experiences, and expositions or persuasive writing about current events. It prompted some students who had perhaps come to this country from elsewhere to write about aspects, good or bad, of becoming part of a community in a new country.

13 *Improve your lot*

This stimulus piece focuses on the need for education, learning and knowledge if people are to achieve their hopes and dreams. The written text points out that self-improvement is all important and depends largely on a decision to gain an education. Some students used ideas from the cover of Malala's book to discuss her remarkable actions, instrumental in effecting changes for the better, for girls in particular. The other titles shown serve to reinforce the idea that all people have in their own power the means to achieve what they want. Some students wrote inspirational speeches to persuade an audience that each person is responsible for the future they want. Others wrote real or fictional accounts of the life of one of the other authors indicated or of people these authors may have written about.

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, 49% of students responded to both visual and written stimulus pieces. An additional 41% responded to only written stimulus pieces and a mere 7% 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 engage 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.

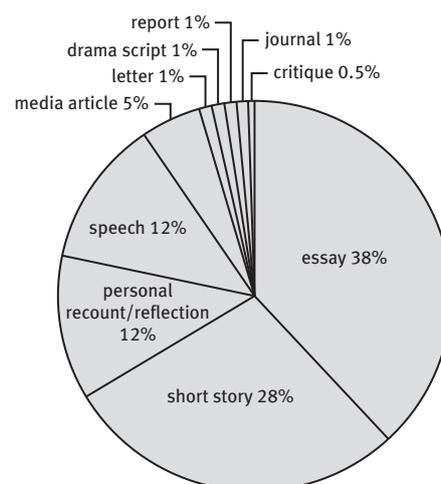
In 2015, the most popular text type for students was the expository response, with 36% of students writing in this form. This was closely followed by imaginative pieces, written by 31% of students. Persuasive responses accounted for 19% of scripts and 14% of responses were reflective.

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 shown in the diagram here, in 2015, the most popular genre was the essay, the next most popular the short story. Personal recounts, reflections and speeches 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.



Popularity of genre: total sample

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.

Personal recount/reflection

Students can elect to write about themselves. They may produce a piece that recounts or reviews a personal experience or a piece that reflects on their lives or their ideas. This genre is reminiscent of some sorts of blog entries on the internet. The popularity of this genre is not surprising.

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 should 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 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 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.

Letter

Letters can often provide challenges in Vocabulary and in 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.

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.

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.

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 70.

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 the criterion of central idea when there is uneven development of the idea 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.

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 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.

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, *What feeds us*, several times is not demonstrating the criterion of 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?’

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.

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.

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 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 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.

Length

This 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.

2015

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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the conventions of writing (subject-verb agreement, participle use, antecedent agreement, pronoun choice, tense, etc.) • correct punctuation • correct spelling. 	<p>For a 1+ the writing demonstrates coherence and cohesion through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • controlled structuring • deliberate sequencing of ideas and images. 	<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; <i>or</i> 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 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

Painting Memories is a short story in which a daughter visits her mother in a care facility. She brings with her the paints and brushes that her mother once loved to use and watches her come alive again as she paints. As she arrives for her visit, the daughter is 'fighting against the coil of dread in her stomach'; later, as her mother becomes absorbed in her painting the daughter is 'smiling happily'. The change in the daughter's emotions is used effectively in the development and resolution of the central idea of this simple story. The links to the overall concept and to stimulus piece 11 are subtle but strong.

Response 2

In the defense (sic) of fangirling uses stimulus piece 11 as a starting point for a persuasive feature article that encourages readers to enjoy, rather than dismiss this new form of storytelling. It argues that rather than being trivial and unrealistic, it can, like some earlier forms, satisfy the need to escape from the realities of life and has the potential to inspire us with hope for mankind. The control of language shown in the conversational style of the writing contributes to the success of this response.

Response 3

The Culinary Composition of Life represents the writer's life as being food. In this novel approach to the events and to the associated discussion, it develops the metaphor as it deals with the various chapters of the writer's life. The links to the overall concept and to stimulus pieces 1 and 12 are overt throughout.

Response 4

The Fundamental 'Food' of Humankind is a formal essay that suggests how it is that we become individuals. It develops its thesis by referring to the works of poets and writers, and then to the psychoanalytical theories of Freud, Lyotard and Maslow. The discriminating selection of vocabulary in this discussion indicates a clear understanding of the subject matter that has been used and adapted to result in a strong response to the overall concept and to stimulus pieces 1 and 4.

Response 5

Tiers of Humiliation is an engaging and humorous reflection on what is presented as being real-life experience for the writer. It is presented as a narrative of 'the first step on the bumpy path to self-improvement'. The chronological structure has allowed for the development of the suspense that drives the response. There are clear connections to both the overall concept and to the ideas in stimulus piece 13.

Painting Memories

Her heels clicked on the polished floors, echoing in the quietly muttering hallway as she weaved around nurses in crisp, white uniforms moving efficiently and silently from one doorway to another like ants. The glare from the yellow fluorescents was blinding, an ignorant contrast to the gray, sombre clouds outside.

She cringed as two elderly men looked up from their card game to glare at her and clutched her paper package against her chest more tightly. She never understood why they had put her mother in a place like this. It was suffocating and to put a woman who was so free and happy into a jail with padded walls instead of bars broke her heart. A caged sparrow never sings as sweetly as its friends who fly, even if it was injured. Hopefully, today would change that.

She approached the doorway just as a nurse left, holding a tray of untouched food.

"How is she today?" she asked as she peeked into the room to see an old woman sitting in a padded arm chair, staring lifelessly out the window.

"Unfortunately, you've come on a bad day. She's not remembering much and refuses to eat," replied

the nurse. She touched her hand reassuringly and then left to attend to her other charges.

Lucy walked into the room slowly, fighting against the coil of dread in her stomach. She glanced at the framed photographs on the bedside table, a dusty, futile attempt to jog her mother's memory.

The illness had started slowly with her forgetting where she had put the car keys and placing the milk in the pantry instead of the fridge, but now she barely recognised her own reflection, let alone the face of her daughter.

She walked to the chair beside her mother and sat down, carefully placing the package on her lap. Her mother didn't even glance at her, lost as she was in the sky outside. Her eyes were cloudy and crinkled, weighed down with a lifetime of events she couldn't remember. Her cheeks were gaunt and her fragile, wrinkled skin was so translucent that her face was mapped with delicate spider webs of blue.

"Hi, Mum. How are you today?" she asked quietly, picking up a fragile, weathered hand and holding it in her own. There was no response. "I brought you something," she continued, placing the wrapped package in her mother's lap and slowly peeling back the paper. She picked up a soft, fine brush and ran it softly down the length of her

mother's hand. The old woman looked down, startled, before a small, shocked grin spread across her face.

"Uncle David had your old paints and brushes packed away in storage, but I thought you might like to have them here," she stated softly, feeling a knot loosen in her stomach as she looked at the joy and wonder on her mother's face. "Here," she said as she placed the brush in her mother's grip and set up her water colours and easel in front of her.

Her mother's eyes brightened and she dipped her brush into the jar of water and started wetting the paints, just like Lucy had seen her do as a little girl, standing at her mother's elbow. She sat back and watched, her mother happier than she had seen her since her husband had died. Her weathered hands shook but when she brought the brush to the page, the line was straight and steady.

A single, silent tear dropped onto Lucy's lap but she wiped it away, smiling happily, and began to talk to her mother. She told her about her grandchildren and how quickly they were growing, how the dog misses her and the neighbour had an accident last week, but really she just watched the clarity in her mother's eyes and the joy on her face as she painted. When Lucy left hours later, she had a painting clutched tightly

to her chest. It was an image of a mother holding her new child, smiling down at it in love and wonder.

Feature Article for Pop Culture Website: "In the Defense of Fangirling"

Last night was one of those rare nights I had no obligations, no duties... no guilt. So last night, I scrolled through Tumblr, as I often do when I want to relax. I scrolled down my dash for perhaps an hour before this post caught my eye:

"Sam and I'm crying over Sabriel. Sob."

Sabriel is, of course, the speculated romance between the angel Gabriel and Sam the human, characters from "Supernatural".

I imagine the usual response to seeing such a post would be a groan and an eye-roll, but I challenge you to see something more. I admit I've never cried over a fictional relationship at three in the morning, but I can't deny that I am a practitioner of other forms of 'fangirling' - the act of getting extremely excited or otherwise very emotionally involved with a fictional story or character. I say it's time the eye-rolling and groaning in reaction stopped, and people appreciate the value fannish behaviour can have.

The concept of story-telling as escapism has existed for centuries, ever since Ancient Greek theatre featured tragedy for the sake of catharsis. Now, escapism takes many forms - countless attendants to fan conventions such as Supanova and Comic Con, fanfiction full of alternate endings and speculative romance, and beautiful fan art that rivals the source text.

In this age of high stress, fast-moving lives and depersonalisation through technology, fans use television, film and books to escape the dull reality of our world. Our chance to dress up as our favourite character, spend hours watching television shows and even cry about fictional romances is what keeps us going. We feed off the emotion of the tortured Anakin Skywalker, and the beautiful imagery of anime such as "Blue Exorcist", to find respite from taxes, traffic jams and bad news.

Despite this escapism, however, fandoms offer the chance to experience real emotions and humanity. There is something inspiring and exhilarating about watching fictional characters go through emotional rollercoasters. We admire the courage of Indiana Jones in the face of adversity, and swoon over N's smile despite all his years of isolation from the world.

In light of this, it's fair to say these works keep us grounded. Their stories, while they may take place in a galaxy far, far away, remind us to have hope in humanity. Despite the destruction and war we see every night on the news, the lives of fictional characters tell us there is good in man. Darth Vader redeemed his evil deeds by destroying the Sith Lord; half-demons Rin and Yukio proved their humanity and saved their friends; Lord Business sacrificed himself to stop his weapon from freezing the Lego World in place. Time and time again, the truth in fiction has restored fans' faith in reality.

Therefore, while it's easy to say 'fangirling' is ridiculous, it's kept so many of us going. It's let us

escape the dull world and fed us hope for it too. So, next time a fan squeals about Ash's friendship with Pikachu, let's not roll our eyes, but tip our hats.

Response 3

The Culinary Composition of Life.

Over time, I've come to treat life as a sort of recipe that is yet to be completed. The base of the meal was given generously to me at birth, and I am the chef with the task of figuring out the missing steps to create the most delicious, memorable experience I can. I seek the finest and freshest ingredients the world has to offer, and chop and mix and blend them together until I've created a memory or a belief that somehow defines who I am. This has always been a selective process, as I am not the sort of chef who ambitiously throws together a plan with faith that the end result will taste divine. No, I am a cautious one, who will only let the bittersweet flavours of the people around me have an impact ~~on~~ if they pass my critical judgement and prove to compliment each other fantastically. I've made my fair share of mistakes, but from them I've learned that I can afford to be fussy. Each course is a valuable chapter in my story, after all.

I first began to experiment with the recipe of my life when I was twelve, when I suddenly realised I possessed the power to change the way it tasted. Like most other almost-teenagers, I was filled with a desire to discover my true identity as a person, and felt a hunger to develop into my wonderful adult self. My still naive and childish mind became lost in ambition, and this hunger quickly transformed into an actual starvation for food. Uncertain of myself and lacking confidence, I ate my feelings, stuffing everything I could down my throat until I felt a little more content with myself. The internet informed me I had developed what psychologists called "Binge Eating Disorder,"

and a longing for food took over my every thought. I gained weight rapidly, which instead of helping me grow into the ideal version of myself I had visualised, threw me into an intense state of depression. I was consumed by feelings of hatred toward myself, my sense of value for who I am swallowed and digested by longing to be someone else. I did recover, just by growing older and losing my appetite both literally and metaphorically, but I brought with me the lesson that maybe literal consumption isn't the way to obtain the nutrients I need for a happy heart and future. There are other platters of tastes to explore.

When I grew slightly older, I began to experiment with other means of feeding my soul, and found contentment in faith. I immersed myself in the Lutheran church and engorged myself on the word of God, relating whole-heartedly to the story of the Last Supper from my painful experience with over-eating. Receiving Holy Communion and taking bread and wine cleared my mind and freed me from my regret. I was shown a new, deeper side to the concept of being fed, not just physically, but now spiritually. The Lord provides me with what I truly need, which proved to be more than just love and acceptance at that time, but also the confidence in myself I required to live healthily. I feel truly blessed to have the gift of taste, and access to as many delicacies as I like, but I also am grateful for the realization that there are more things that provide sustenance than just food.

In my last few years of highschool, I have placed my chef's hat upon my head, tied my apron around my waist, and really taken it upon myself to let the most impressive and pleasurable flavours affect my attitude. I am filled with motivation to grow in experience and aspiration, and eager to perfect the steps in this course of the dish of my life. My favourite thing to season each day with is by far my friends. Their salty, sweet, tangy personalities offer variance in my life so it never gets bland and boring. They feed my spirits, lifting me up to a feeling that's happier than the richest dessert could ever make me. That's why I'm determined not only to write the recipe to my own life, but also to return their flavour and feed them. What good is a meal you cannot share with those you love? I'd prefer their company to my own any day.

Ultimately, I believe that what feeds humanity is not as we think, food. Of course it's a necessity of survival, but survival is not the meaning of life - it's to give life meaning. This meaning for me comes from knowing I am in control of creating whatever masterpiece I like from the lessons, the love and the people I experience. There will always be tastes we enjoy, and those we don't, but we are all unique in our recipes, and ~~that is what gives~~ ~~us~~ satisfying that craving for joy is what I believe life is all about, and so I will live ~~generously~~ abundantly as the chef of my culinary destiny, dishing out all the happiness I can.

The Fundamental 'Food' of Humankind

Littern May, a Polish poet, wrote in his 1957 poem, 'Boardwalks', that "We are not afraid of who we are, but of what we have become." The poem was written as a reflection upon the Polish Civil War. These lines of the poem, in the context of May's wartime experience, might suggest that humankind are born with a nature of innocence, however, once 'evil' is expected of them, they may succumb to it. Contrastingly, William Golding, author of the 1957 novel 'Lord of the Flies', stated that "Man produces evil as a bee produces honey." Golding was a victim of the Second World War and perpetuated the belief that humankind have an innate evil. In light of Golding's contrasting beliefs, the validity of May's statement can be assessed through examining what develops an individual to be who they are; what fundamentally 'feeds' humankind. This can be explored by applying several psychoanalytical theories.

Sigmund Freud, a pioneer of psychoanalysis, theorised that from the moment an individual is born, they are both a victim and perpetrator of 'privileging'. Freud explains that to 'privilege' is to "openly value one individual above another, creating a sense of rejection in the second individual." This act, Freud continues to explain, results in a developmental flaw in both the victim and the 'benefitor'. A life-long cycle of 'obesity' of self-esteem will result in some, whilst 'malnourishment' of self-esteem will occur in others. The Psychological Board of Statistics estimated there to be a resulting 'instinct of wrong-doing' in 82% of the global population, directly attributing this to unbalanced self-confidence. This developed instinct directly supports May's belief in evil being a developmental flaw, rather than an innate one.

Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy' of Needs' reflects Freud's theory of privileging, and further explores the impact of self-esteem upon an individual. Maslow proposes that above all, humans require self-actualisation to maintain a healthy mentality; an individual is psychologically fed by understanding of their self. Second to this, humans need self-esteem as well as the esteem of others - although not in excess, as well as a sense of love/belonging, safety, and physiological comfort. Maslow theorises that so long as each of these needs are satisfied, an individual will maintain a healthy psyche and therefore be protected from 'evil' temptation. This supports May's proposal of a developmental 'evil' instinct as Maslow's Hierarchy suggests that if any of the human psychological needs are not met, the human psyche will weaken and be exposed to crude influences.

Jacques Francois Lyotard's suggestion of 'Genetic Tendencies' asserts that "each of us is an accumulation of the traits, genetic tendencies, locations and peculiarities of our forebears." Lyotard's theory proposes that an individual is essentially fed to be the person they are through their genes. This reflects Golding's ideas and contradicts May's, as Lyotard rejects the concept of outside influences remodelling an individual's innate traits and tendencies.

Freud and Maslow conjointly support Litten May's statement that "We are not afraid of who we are, but of what we have become," as they theorise that evil instinct is not innate, therefore not a part of 'who we [genetically] are', but rather, it is an accumulated instinct resulting from mistreatment by others and unfulfilled needs, therefore 'what we have become'. Alternatively, Lyotard perpetuates the concept of geneological instinct, contradicting May. This does not invalidate May's

statement, but rather, reflects that an individual may be mentally 'fed' by both the DNA which creates them and the influences surrounding them throughout life.

Tiers of Humiliation

I have two phobias: public speaking and ants. I am terrified of ants, who have the ability to burrow malevolently into your brain via your ears (as I've learnt from documentaries). However, above all, I abhor public speaking. I'm not talking about a mere quickened heartbeat, or hitched breath. I'm talking about an absolutely sweat-dripping, wobbly kneed, almost swooning, terror at the prospect of standing in front of an audience. That's why, as I'm sitting like a lamb headed to the slaughter, my brain still fumbles to fathom my predicament. My dress, a second skin and respiratory restrictor, is a gaudy contraption comprised of hot pink and horrid frills. The flower-perfumed air dims my already alcohol-laden senses as I gaze down at the crumpled speech for my sister's wedding clutched between my sweaty palms. The inspiring, overly chirpy voice of the motivational documentary presenter ^{that echoes around my head} is the only thing nailing me to this spot, reminding me of my vow to begin the journey to self-improvement - the journey to over-coming my phobias. I grimace inwardly as the infuriating voice reminds me: fear feeds failure; bravery feeds success.

My mind is wrenched back to reality as the last, tinkling notes of an exuberant laugh flutter across the soft breath of wind and the gathering sinks into the soft hum of expectant silence. My name echoes in the dense stillness. This is it. My chair scrapes awkwardly as I scramble to

my feet, as startling as the first crack of thunder before a storm erupts. Blood rushes to my face and I can just imagine my skin done merging with that of my garish, sweat-stained bridesmaid dress. Fear feeds failure; bravery feeds success. I grasp the mantra like a life-line as hundreds of eyes swivel to follow my nervous progress, marred by my abominable inability to walk in heels, to the small stage. The microphone squeals in understandable protest as I (and my putrid armpits) move closer in order to begin. My stomach grumbles in discomfort, the three-course meal I have just basically inhaled taunting the back of my throat - my body's natural, homeostatic response to dangerous, unfavourable conditions. Fear feeds failure; bravery feeds success.

I pause. I breathe. I begin:

"My sister, the beautiful Br-URP!"

What was that? Was that me? Surely not. However, my stomach does feel suspiciously less tumultuous. I close my eyes to the horrified stares as realisation melds into dread. My stomach has succeeded in returning to its comfortable state, successfully capturing the butterflies running rampage in my small intestines and sending them back into the atmosphere, through a microphone, as a gaseous compound. Unfortunately, my mental state has not survived the outburst as unscathed. The sea of eyes fixated on my face,

previously almost resignedly, now widen with humour. Mouths, previously turned down in boredom, flick at the edges, poking dimples into smooth cheeks. With my face burning hotter than Hades, my eyes squinting to capture the cascade of humiliating tears, I turn to return, defeated, back to my chair. With the very first step, however, my world is plunged into darkness, every sense obliterated. Except for hearing...

"Save the cake!"

This one, haunting screech returns to bounce around my already thumping skull, adding drills to the hammers already wreaking havoc on my dulled wits. I blink. I blink again. Sitting up, I inspect the pristine, sanitary whiteness that stretches to the edges of my vision, painting the image of a hospital setting. Wriggling to get a better look, my attention is captured by a piercing pain originating in my ankle. When I scratch my head in confusion, my fingers come in contact with a sticky, sickly sweet, suspiciously pink substance. I groan audibly as the memories barrage their way into my throbbing head, bringing with them the dark cloud of humiliation at what has happened. However, this dark cloud has a silver lining. Although today was not entirely successful, I took my first step on the bumpy path to self-improvement. I faced my greatest fear with admirable bravery, shattering my resolve to never speak in public. Fear feeds

failure; bravery feeds success.

I lie back down on my plush pillow, willing to thrust my phobias into the dark recesses of refused acknowledgement. But, just as my eyes begin to sever the connection between consciousness and sleep, an ominous dot, with six legs, scuttles menacingly across the pearly pillow, making a bee-line for my exposed ear...

Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority

PO Box 307, Spring Hill QLD 4004 Australia
Level 7, 154 Melbourne Street, South Brisbane

T + 61 7 3864 0299

F + 61 7 3221 2553

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au