Statistics

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Characteristics of good responses

Criterion 1 — Knowledge and control of texts in their contexts

Success in this criterion is achieved when candidates show an awareness of how meanings in texts are shaped by purpose, cultural context and social situation. Discrimination in the selection of subject matter is the key aspect of this criterion.

Candidates were rewarded for demonstrating their ability to:

- exploit the conventions of genres for particular purposes
- substantiate analysis with well-balanced evidence
- analyse texts, ideas and issues
- respond to the demands placed on them through the roles and relationships adopted when responding to particular questions.

Criterion 2 — Knowledge and control of textual features

Success in this criterion is achieved when candidates show an awareness of appropriateness of textual features for purpose, genre and register.

Candidates were rewarded for demonstrating their ability to:

- logically and cohesively organise and arrange ideas
- control spelling, punctuation and paragraphing
- use clause and sentence structures for effect
- maintain grammatical accuracy
- use a wide range of vocabulary including figurative uses.
Criterion 3 — Knowledge and application of the constructedness of texts

Success in this criterion is achieved when candidates show an awareness of the ways in which texts are selectively constructed and read.

Candidates were rewarded for demonstrating their ability to:

• make choices that invite the reader to take up intended positions
• analyse how readers are invited to take up positions
• evaluate representations
• shape representations
• examine how cultural assumptions, values, beliefs and attitudes underpin texts.

Common weaknesses

Criterion 1 — Knowledge and control of texts in their contexts

Candidates are reminded of the need to provide analysis and evaluation of texts, as opposed to simply providing a synopsis or overview of the text. In those cases in which analysis was required, many responses tended to become recounts of the text. Consequently, while most candidates were able to reveal some knowledge of the texts (though not always understanding) they were not consistent in making these relevant to the question.

Almost all candidates were able to respond in a way which revealed a sound understanding of their selected genres, with few responses failing to make their intentions clear. Many responses needed further development to show that sufficient relevant subject matter had been selected.

Criterion 2 — Knowledge and control of textual features

In the responses which showed significant weakness in this criterion, there were usually multiple errors. In some cases, poor sequencing and organisation of subject matter was a serious detractor and in others, basic language skill errors, particularly in grammar, pulled these responses down. The most frequent grammar weakness was in failing to separate ideas into short sentences or failing to link ideas into more complex sentence structures, leading to “run-on” sentences. Sentence fragments, while sometimes entirely appropriate in imaginative writing, were rarely used to effect. Poor paragraphing was a weakness in a number of responses.

There was a tendency to list quotes and add a comment at the beginning or end. Quotations must be used to support a point, not to make it. Candidates are reminded that the inclusion of a direct quote is not a substitute for analysis.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to plan their responses, paying particular attention to cohesion and the importance of editing their own work.

Criterion 3 — Knowledge and application of the constructedness of texts

By simply providing an overview of the texts studied, candidates deprived themselves of opportunities to showcase their understanding of most of the aspects of this criterion. Many candidates were able to identify the invited readings of texts and the representations within texts. However, very few were able to analyse the means by which texts achieve these readings. While the analytical expository responses were the most obvious places for this to occur, all responses
required this type of analysis in order to demonstrate the ability to invite readers to take up positions.

Candidates had considerable difficulty with the concept of representations. Candidates also tended to use terms like foregrounding and privileging (rarely spelled correctly) in inappropriate ways. There seemed to be considerable confusion of these terms in particular.

Candidates’ responses indicated a clear understanding of the ways that texts are shaped to invite readers to take up positions in relation to them. Candidates with weaker responses were less able to shape representations in convincing ways. This was generally when writers selected subject matter about which they seemed to know little.

Sample responses

The responses below were selected from those scripts that met the A or B standard as defined by the assessment criteria. They have been reproduced exactly as written and therefore include any spelling or grammatical errors made by candidates.

Paper One Part A

Question 1: Novel — imaginative response to literature

Topic chosen: 1A

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The ringing silence of my bungalow is overshadowed by Gatsby’s now sleeping mansion. My suitcase is packed and to be honest, I can’t wait to leave West Egg, as I have had my full of the careless, bored and rich, such as Tom Buchanan. Memories of Tom and Myrtle’s party in the city still rise in my mind and I can’t help but feel sorry for Tom and his synthetic life.

Tom Buchanan hasn’t changed a bit since the New Haven days, he is still an unspeakable cad. I remember when he told me he had “some woman in New York” as well as Daisy, his sweet little fool. Tom is the sort of fellow who thinks the grass is greener on both sides. His naive Daisy and vital Myrtle. If only it was selfishness Tom suffered from, but it wasn’t, his careless, brutish ways always made me feel like i was watching through the bars at some awful circus. Even still, I was schocked by the hulking brute’s actions at his party in the city, with Myrtle.

“I have only been drunk twice in my life and the second time was that afternoon”. Tom and Myrtle’s party was lively and lewd and I remember wanting to get some air outside, however, the powers that be must have wanted me to witness the drunken foolery between Tom and his city girl. Myrtle was wild with drink and her raccous laughter was like a hyena, screeching into the tender parts of my ears. Her classless life had taught her no tact as she taunted Tom amongst the guests with the cry of “Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!”. Though that was not which schocked me, for poor Myrtle was clearly parading around in her “new money”, trying to be a lady of the East. It was Tom’s actions which startling me out of an observant reverie, as his open hand broke her nose, the blood flowed and the hyena wailed.

Although I know Tom is a brute, I still can’t help but feel dissapointed in a man whose upbringing should have taught him better. All the man had to say to me as he walked me out that night was “Come for lunch someday”. Tom’s flippant disregard for his actions is a thing I do not like and wish to never accept in a friend. Like I said to Gatsby, “they’re a rotten crowd … you’re worth the
whole damn bunch”. Tom and Daisy are rotten, their seemingly perfect lives, have all that privilege and money can buy, but it means nothing when I see them as a symbol of the destructive nature of the human race.

As I double check the clasp on my suitcase, anxious to leave, I ponder if I would ever see Tom Buchanan again and decide I would much rather not. I am looking forward to going back home and ridding myself of the drama, drink and dilemmas this place has given me. When I did run into Tom and refrained from shaking his hand, he was incredulous. “You're crazy Nick … crazy as hell”. So in the end I did shake his hand, knowing that Tom’s intellect was never capable of understanding all the reasons why. I think Tom will go about his life, ever carelessly smashing things up and I am glad I will be at a safe distance, for I see the time bomb ticking in his eyes and too many men have been pierced with shrapnel of late and I, for one, will not let it happen to me. Tom represents what I hate and his values are pure enjoyment, which is seemingly fun, but in the end, dreadfully sickening.

Paper One Part B

Question 2: Drama — persuasive/reflective response to literature

Topic chosen: 2A

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Is Something Rotten In The State Of Denmark?

(The candidate) suggests high schools around the world have got it wrong.

“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” Ah, indeed I believe you are right Marcellus – very rotten indeed. You must be referring to Shakespeare's play itself: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

I could a tale unfold to you, trusted Reader, whose lightest words would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood. The tale goes as follows … ever since English syllabi were invented, high school students across the globe (pun intended) have been subjected to this torturing, antiquated excuse for a play. I for one pity them, after all they are attending classes for English. Not old English nor for foreign language!

Of course I'm inciting controversy here. Teachers, literary scholars, historical researchers and boffins will be appalled at the content of this column. Good for them. I say Shakespeare's work is out-of-date and thus inappropriate, hard to read and boring.

Shakespeare invites his audience to identify and sympathise with the play's main character, the young Prince Hamlet. “Poor little rich boy,” we all think as we observe his heartache over the murder of his father. But, trusted Reader, this is where the trouble begins – as Hamlet begins plotting against his Uncle, the new king Claudius, the audience is lulled into blindly supporting Hamlet in his quest – despite his irritating inaction. The ensuing plot becomes a cesspool of highly irrelevant and inappropriate constructs.

Shakespeare professes, “frailty, thy name is woman” and “old men have a plentiful lack of wit.” And we all applaud. Why? Respectively, these commentaries are sexist and ageist. If someone said this to you in the street (assuming you are female or elderly), would you approve? This is just the beginning though, it is Prince Hamlet's actions that cause me the most concern.

Hamlet was written in a time of an unrefined judicial system. Claudius kills his brother the king. When Hamlet learns of this (through yet another archaic and out-of-date concept), he decides an appropriate reaction is to kill Claudius. However, in the process he becomes responsible for the
deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, Laertes, his own mother Queen Gertrude, Claudius and finally himself. Oh woe is me! How can we give this drivel to our children to read? What’s worse, the audience learns that Horatio of all people will be held responsible for the recount to Denmark’s people of the sick and bloody deeds. He’s the most likely person to paint Prince Hamlet’s actions in a positive light. Well, I’m sorry trusted Reader, taint not thy mind. Shakespeare has not craft enough to colour this miching mallecho.

Hamlet’s themes are not pertinent anymore either. For example, royalty is like totally ohmigod so not fashionable anymore. Murder for the throne?! Yeah right buddy, not in today’s society. And what of marrying your dead brother’s wife? Big deal! Incest exists in much more sinister forms.

Trusted Reader, I implore you to look within and ask yourself this question: “Do I want my children to be tortured by this impossible literature? Do I want them to be lulled into thinking this sort of behaviour and outcome is acceptable?”

“Okay, okay. Stop right there”, I hear you say. You tell me I can’t go against hundreds of years of appreciation for Hamlet. Well, okay, trusted Reader. Fair enough, I’ve had my rant. Let’s humour you for a minute. Shakespeare’s work is not out-of-date, nor hard to read nor boring. Hamlet contains themes that remain highly relevant to this day – murder, revenge, loss, grief, suicide, death, political corruption, war and more are explored. Hamlet can be easy to read (or watch). With a little bit of attention, one can really get into the rhythm. And lastly, Hamlet is anything but boring. A well-performed production is entertaining, gripping, hilarious and very easy to understand.

Trusted Reader, I don’t know what your view is but I think I’ll stick with the Bard himself on this one, “O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!”

Paper One Part B

Question 3: Non-fiction prose — persuasive/reflective response suitable for the mass media or for speaking and/or presenting to an audience, specific or general

Topic chosen: 3B

My Place by Sally Morgan

Good afternoon all and welcome to this afternoon’s book club meet. As you all know, today we’ll be discussing Sally Morgan’s My Place. Released in 1987, it became an Australian bestseller. It proved itself to be controversial and revealing and was later included in high school English syllabi across the country.

This autobiographical work consists of four parts (or stories). Morgan begins with her own story growing up as a child then follows with the stories of her great-Uncle, her Mother and finally her Grandmother. She interlaces her own autobiography as well inbetween stories to provide context.

Morgan invites the reader to acknowledge and understand the mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians in Australia’s recent history. Morgan herself is part-Aboriginal.

All of the stories that make up the book provide evidence and personal recounts to the reader of mistreatment towards Aboriginal Australians. Morgan frequently mentions (both writing as herself and her family members) that one of her biggest concerns is to ensure her work is accurate and truthful. Writing for a member of her family she says, “it’s gotta be the truth if it goes in a book”. This task proved to be an enormous one as Morgan had a lot of research to do – she didn’t even
know she was Aboriginal whilst growing up, “tell them you’re Indian,” her mother had told her. Morgan goes on to explain that being Aboriginal was worse than being Greek, Italian or Indian.

Due to her secretive upbringing, Morgan’s decision in 1979 to write a book about her family led her on a powerful and rewarding journey to learn about her family and Aboriginal history in general. The opportunity gave her an opportunity to look within herself and at last find her own identity. Some of the words in this text are quite moving because of Morgan’s ability to emotively explain her innermost thoughts on this journey of self-discovery.

Of course, such a personal and revealing story has a chance of being very one-sided. The book makes some shocking claims and the people who are the subject of these claims have most certainly been silenced.

Although the book simmers with an abundance of examples of mistreatment, it is that caused by the Drake-Brockman family that cause the biggest stir with readers. Morgan’s Grandmother, Daisy, was servant to the family on their farm. Daisy also gave birth to Gladys (Morgan’s mother) during employment by the family. Allegations include withholding of wages, overworking, malnourishment, sexual assault and rape.

Although never fully resolving the issue, Morgan suggests both her Mother and Grandmother were born to white station-owners. “It was a real privilege to have a whitefella want you” laments Daisy.

The book does include recounts of meets that Morgan had with members of the Drake-Brockman family but the reader is generally invited to disregard their input by Morgan’s familiarity with using highly emotive and powerful words.

The Drake-Brockman family felt so wronged they even published their own book. It didn’t win over the same critical acclaim as My Place.

Despite the silencing of the Drake-Brockman family, the reader is still able to “think for themselves” when interpreting the text and overall, a balanced view can be achieved.

I hope you all enjoy the read, it can be entertaining and humorous as well so don’t be scared off. I recommend you stay aware of the many silenced characters however – perhaps even read the Drake-Brockman’s book as well (I don’t recall the name of it but will bring it along next week). Up next we have Alex Garland’s The Beach. Any questions?

Paper Two Part A

Question 1: Imaginative and reflective writing

Topic chosen: 1A

Precious Little time

“Your results are not good, I’m afraid, Mr Jameson”

The doctor peered over his wire-rimmed spectacles, his nevous-twitch betraying the storm behind his calm, grey eyes.

“Really?” Glen Jameson replied, weakly, fumbling through the files of his brain to find an appropriate reaction.

“No, not good at all.”

“So, how bad is it?”
The doctor pushed back his chair and walked towards the window. How can one be an oncologist for twenty-five years and never get used to tell people the words no-one wants to hear? He gazed through the blinds and the smoggy city-scape. “You may only have a number of months before full-time hospitalisation for treatment,” he began, sucking in a deep breath “and even with our most aggressive treatment…” he trailed off.

“Yes.”

“We would really only act to prolong your life by a matter of weeks. I am so sorry, Mr Jameson. I would strongly advise that you use your time to its best use. You have a family?”

“I’m divorced, two kids.”

“Well, you know what to do.”

“Yes. Thank you doctor.”

Glen felt that he had been punched in the face. He reeled out of the doctors office and onto the street in a complete daze. How the hell would he tell his kids? How could he suddenly turn around and say “daddy has to go” and how much he loved them? He started the engine of his car and began to head towards his apartment.

Suddenly, impulsively, he turned the car around. Why tell his kids he loved them? Why try to explain? Why not show them?

He parked outside the school and entered the office, demanding to take his children. The secretary scuttled out to their class-rooms and after hurried discussions with the kid’s teachers, sent Tom and Evangaline to their dad.

“Daddy!” Tommy and Evangaline ran into their father’s open arms. “Why are you here? Its not your turn to pick us up till Monday,” asked Tom.

“I want to show you something,” whispered Glen

“Get in the car now.”

As Glen drove, Evangaline and Tom spoke of their own adventures and travels at school and how they went to a friend’s birthday party and how Tom had won three games and Evangaline had won two. Little things, silly things. Things that no-one would ever remember. Things that burned into Glen’s heart, like a fire of memory.

When they reached their destination, everyone bundled out of the car.

“We’re at the beach!” Tom squealed, delightedly, racing towards the waves. But Evangaline held back.

“The sea is so big, daddy” she whimpered, holding her father’s hand

“Yes, the sea is massive,” Glen stared out to the horizon, straining as far as the eye could see.

“Yes it is big, but do you know what’s bigger?”

“No?” Evangaline peered up at Glen questioningly.

“See out there? The ocean goes on farther than your eyes can reach. Its so big. But every time you think of how big the sea is, think of how much more I love you.”

Evangaline was already distracted by the pretty sea shells. “You know what I want to be when I grow up, dad?”

“What?”

“A doctor, so people will never die. And you will never leave me.”

“I’ll never leave you.”

“Good” And she hugged him, her soft, child’s skin pillowing gently against him.
“Want to play?” she enquired
“No, I’ll just watch you” he replied

Their Mum was furious when Glen finally dropped the kids home. She demanded to know the meaning of his behaviour. “I’m dying” Glen thought, but said nothing.

Glen lay alone in his bath. The warm water cocooning his cooling body, an empty packet of sleeping pills in his stiffened hand. Why prolong the pain? He had done what he needed to do.

Paper Two Part B

Question 2: Media

Topic chosen: 2B

The Chux advertisement and the Jamie Durie barbeque advertisement show two very different, yet very stereotypical representations of gender. In the Chux advertisement, a woman involved in her daily activities is foregrounded to represent our socially accepted view of women’s roles in the home. Foregrounding the “manly” task of barbecuing in the Jamie Durie advertisement, however, positions the audience to believe that out-doors is a purely male domain. Both advertisements use various techniques to achieve these representations.

The Chux paper-towel advertisement foregrounds a woman carrying a jug of cordial to a boy who we assume to be her son. The idea that the woman’s role is to stay in the house is privileged as the father-figure is surprisingly absent. The female model is shown to be about to step on some loose marbles lying on the floor thus incorporating the “messy children” discourse for “unexpected spills”. Their is no doubt in the audiences mind that it will be the mother who cleans up the mess.

The child’s faked innocent expression suggests that the marbles were put on the floor for the specific purpose of tripping the mother up, the Chux advertisement reinforces the idea that boys are more concerned about pranks and having fun than keeping clean. The mother’s expression, however, portrays peace and willingness to serve, no matter the unexpected consequences.

The Jamie Durie advertisement shows a totally different image. “Man’s world” is the discourse used in this advertisement and every inch of the image is focussed on all things masculine. A blokey, bonding moment is foregrounded in this ad. Three men and a dog stand around a shiny, new barbecue, all seemingly comfortable and enjoying the atmosphere. The stereotype of men drinking beer outside is a common one and one that is used in a variety of advertisements.

The text saying “everyone can be a barbie masterchef” is slightly ironic considering the silence of women in this advertisement. Every man can be a barbie masterchef, but women are excluded. The outdoors barbeque is strictly a boy thing.

Socially stereotypical representations of gender are strongly reinforced in these advertisements. The mother’s attitude of serving in Print advertisement one clearly demonstrates how ingrained our traditional ideals of women are. Print Advertisement 2, however, shows how carefree a man’s life can be without women. By using foregrounding and positioning techniques, the advertiser causes the audience to pass by these out-of-date ideals without a thought to whether or not the representations are even valid.
Question 3: Poetry

Topic chosen: 3B

The Family Man and Drifters by Bruce Dawe

A Bush Christening by AB (“Banjo”) Patterson

Poetry represent Australians in a variety of ways through textual features. Within the three poems, “The Family Man”, “A Bush Christening”, and “Drifters”, contrasting representations of Australians are given, along with a picture of constancy. Impulsivity and insightfulness are two contrasting characteristics of Australians given, and love for and value of family is an example of continuity presented throughout the three poems.

Impulsivity is represented in “The Family Man” through the father’s quick decision to commit suicide: “That was on Thursday evening. On Saturday he lay dead … having blown away all qualifications with a trigger’s touch.” With little or no thought for his family or friends, the father, in the foreground of this poem, destroyed his life. In the poem, “A Bush Christening,” Maginnis impulsively eavesdrops on his parents and the priest and runs away. Privileging is clearly used here; the reader understands christening, while Maginnis does not, creating a humorous effect. Finally, in “Drifters,” the father decides, or will decide, to leave, for no discernable reason, without looking at the effect it will have on his wife or children. Poetry represents Australians as impulsive people.

Almost to the contrary, though, these same poems also represent Australians as insightful people. The final two lines of “The Family Man” reveal that the narrator sees through the rumours, even though he hardly knew the father. The fifth stanza of “A Bush Christening” uses metaphors, similes, and imagery to describe the child’s insightful mind. The poem “Drifters”, too uses a silenced character. The man’s wife, to display her insight: “… she’ll go out to the vegetable-patch … and notice how the oldest girl is close to tears because she was happy here, and how the youngest girl is beaming because she wasn’t.” The one character not voiced in this poem is the wife, who tells the story, to a degree. Poetry also represents Australians as insightful people.

Finally, each of these three poems displays an element of continuity as a part of their representation of Australians’ characters. “The Family Man” uses mood and tone to portray the value of family to the father. The father spoke “from long experience,” suggesting many years spent as a husband and a father, yet still valuing the experience. “A Bush Christening” uses a hyperbole to describe the value Michael Magee placed on his sons: “… poor Mike had no rest/For the youngster had never been christened.” In a devoutly Catholic family, not being christened was a ticket straight to hell if the child died; thus having no rest as his child had not been christened showed great love for his son. Finally, in “Drifters,” the wife noticed smiles and tears on her daughter’s face, even when they were hidden. Observation of details such as these prove how much she cared for her children. As well as that, when the family first arrived at their current home, the wife showed her husband the fruits of the land and told him to “Make a wish, Tom, make a wish.” Even though he dragged her all around the country, she still wanted him to be happy. The poems show value place on family.

To conclude, then, poetry portrays many different representations of Australians through textual features. Although the three poems analyzed produce contrasting images of Australian characters, they also give a steadfast point, and all of these views help to form a picture of Australians in general. Such characteristics as impulsivity, insight and family value all describe Australians, and textual features such as hyperboles, foregrounding, and gaps help to ingrain these into poetry so that readers perceive them and form images of Australians using these representations.