**EXAMINERS’ REPORTS A2/A1 MAY 2012**

**A2**

**The range and ability of the work submitted**

However, text types which were marked as "magazine articles", "feature articles", and sometimes even "news reports", often gave strong opinions instead of neutral reportage. These would be better written as "opinion columns" or "editorials".

Literary options were most often attempted using poetic text types. Some candidates must remember that, as with cultural option tasks, they need to state their objectives clearly and explain how their task demonstrates an understanding of the literary option on which it is based. This is particularly relevant for candidates who write their own poems and for those who write an alternative ending to a literary work. Candidates must explain in their rationales what their changes to the work tell us about the original or how they help the reader to understand it better.

Some schools tended to produce a large group of tasks in a similar style or using the same topic. They tended to be formulaic, and this is not so much a criticism of the candidates as of the centre's approach. Teachers must not set written tasks or tell their students what to write about.

Candidate performance against each criterion

**Criterion B:** Sometimes the link between task and option was not clear and/or not explicitly made. This is specifically requested in the rationale and assessed under Criterion B. There were instances of content not being appropriate to the stated task.

Candidates who did less well on Criterion B seemed to have difficulty in understanding that it was necessary to show understanding of the cultural and literary option as well as showing an awareness of the form in which they were writing. Some examples of what not to do: news reports containing first-person opinion, letters to the editor addressed directly to a journalist on the paper or in response to an imaginary article. Few candidates seem to be aware of the function or conventions of the editorial.

In other words, written tasks based entirely on form, not content, are unacceptable. A written task is not simply about imitating forms of styles. It is also about showing knowledge and understanding of the option studied. For example, a candidate will not score highly by writing a film review if the film itself and the issues it raises have no connection to course topics listed in the programme studied. In brief, the link to the options studied must not be based on text type alone.

Recommendations for the teaching of future candidates

It is recommended that teachers encourage close adherence to the formal requirements and care in the choice of areas of communication and types of text appropriate to the subject matter of the WT (see above). These requirements are clearly set out in the subject guide.

Candidates also need instruction in the writing of rationales. The rationale is the examiner's means of entry to the task, so candidates need to be clear in what they write. All the bullet points must be addressed. The third bullet point seldom is, and the impression given is that the task's link to course material and to the option is a superficial one. The mark for criterion B may well be affected accordingly.

Poems and song lyrics can be quite problematic for the examiner. Both text types require a good rationale to help the examiner in the marking process.

**Further comments**

It is clear from the rationales written by candidates in some centres that their teachers are assigning them specific tasks, or providing them with a range of set tasks. This is unacceptable according to the WT instructions.

**Higher level and standard level internal assessment**

**The range and suitability of the work submitted / Conduct of the oral examination**

In many cases, succinct but clear teacher comments on the 2/IA form are still needed. These comments invariably aid moderation of the oral. Also, as always, if two or more teachers administer oral commentaries, standardization with some joint marking exercises is necessary to allow consistent moderation of their scores.

Although notes or glossing are not permissible, line numbers are strongly encouraged.

The time limits for the commentary should be closely adhered to.

The discussion should focus on the extract for commentary; teachers should avoid asking questions based on the work of literature in general. Also many teachers need to include sufficient questions on the language and style of the extract.

As well, interrupting a candidate’s presentation too early should be avoided. This should be limited to only the most extreme situations. Nevertheless, if the candidate’s presentation is exceeding roughly 8-10 minutes, it is necessary to intervene to bring the presentation to a conclusion to ensure the inclusion of questions and discussion for at least five minutes.

More commonly, candidates need to be aware of the language of literary analysis.

**Paper 1**

**Recommendations to teachers**

* Candidates should avoid offering lengthy summaries of the texts.
* Students need to “show” more rather than just “tell”. More textual evidence and detailed analysis of specific words/phrases and their effects are needed.
* Candidates’ ability to handle quotes varies a great deal, and they need to be helped with this. Some quote long sections but provide little analysis. Others quote line numbers rather than text (leaving the examiners to chase the examples) or make no attempt to incorporate quotes into grammatically correct sentences.
* Candidates are typically able to identify stylistic devices, but they should be encouraged to explain their effects in more detail.
* While structure for Part B of this year’s exam was often handled well, discussions of structure for Section A were less successful (which has often been the case in past sessions). Teachers need to help candidates to practise identifying the way in which a text’s structure contributes to its meaning or purpose. Students often make superficial observations (number of paragraphs or sentences, whether they are short or long, etc.) to little apparent purpose. If comment on structure is not pertinent, then there is little point in covering that aspect of the rubric.
* Students sometimes lack the terminology to discuss linguistic features (e.g. metaphor, simile, personification, enumeration), resulting in a very general discussion of language.
* Teachers might help candidates to practise describing tone more effectively, as this continues to be a challenge for some.
* Candidates should clearly indicate paragraph breaks, preferably by indentation or even a skipped line if they prefer. Failure to do so results in a loss of marks under criterion B.
* While many candidates seem to abide by a framework for their answer, or use the rubric in the question as their guide, teachers should remind them to use it as a “stepping stone”, and not a “straightjacket”, as one examiner put it. While a framework can help produce a balanced commentary, candidates should be encouraged to focus on aspects of analysis that they feel confident about or that apply best to their question.
* Focused paragraphs (often the best are organized around tone, linguistic and stylistic devices, thematic comparisons etc. wherein each paragraph discusses both texts at the same time), good transitional phrases, a balanced discussion, and the effective integration of quotes make the difference between an organized commentary and an effectively organized commentary.

**Paper 2**

The use of factual, specific evidence was too often less than compelling. Over-generalization is a common pitfall.

Criterion A remains most often the greatest challenge. Many weaker essays seem to struggle to demonstrate more than a superficial or partial awareness of the implications of the question and often also struggle to provide relevant supporting examples. In some cases, it appears that the question has not been read accurately and thus the answer moves in a questionable direction.

Relative to Criterion B, a number of examiners commented on the frequency of long, often unfocused or mostly superfluous introductions. Also, many commented on the frequency of long, poorly organized paragraphs. Many candidates need training in the use of transitions, other cohesive devices, and a general sense of sequence, structure, and organization along with the employment of relevant, effectively integrated examples.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

**Language and Culture**

On the other hand, this question attracted too many candidates keen to discuss such topics but lacking relevant knowledge beyond the very general, anecdotal, or the obvious. Detailed, factual support and examples were frequently absent.

**Media**

Most candidates easily agreed with the claim that young people are “better informed than ever about advertising techniques”, but only a minority supported the contention by demonstrating a detailed, broad awareness of those strategies beyond a few of the more obvious.

Most candidates attempted to discuss both revolutions and propaganda. A minority produced relevant, detailed essays; a larger number struggled to move beyond broad generalizations.

**Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates**

* Candidates should be exposed to texts where irony or humour is present and texts where there is a shift in tone.
* Candidates should avoid summarising the texts and concentrate on the task of comparison.
* This has been said before, but having identified aspects of style, candidates need to go on to explore their effect in greater detail.
* Language skills were good overall but there are candidates who write as they would speak. Run-on sentences or fragments, which perhaps relate to spoken language, should be avoided. Candidates with good fluent language skills did not always score as highly as they should have.
* Handwriting remains an issue, and those candidates with bad handwriting should practise writing as much as possible.

**A1**

**The range and ability of the work submitted**

On the whole a good range of suitable works was chosen by centres, some very familiar and some new and adventurous. One examiner was impressed with the work on surrealism with Cortázar‘s *Blow-up*; other good choices were *The Master and Margarita*, *Death in the Time of Cholera*, *Anna Karenina*, *Fathers and Sons*, *Thérèse Raquin* and *Woman at Point Zero.* Works that are often used and often lead candidates astray in interpretation are Kafka‘s *Metamorphosis,* Camus‘ *The Stranger,* (both of which are undermined by weak usage of ―absurdism and ―existentialism, something that also occurs with *Waiting for Godot* and the Greek plays when they are treated as modern drama.

It becomes increasingly evident that there are almost two polarities in assembling the syllabus for this component: either a set of texts that allow both the talented and the less gifted candidates to find useful topics and display sufficient knowledge and understanding, and a set of texts in which half or more of the candidates are struggling to grasp the works and find topics which are more than rehearsals of some element of the content of the works.

It should be noted that there seemed a large number of penalties this year for candidates writing about incorrect works, repeating works in both assignments, and failing to observe word limits.

**Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates**

Both examiners and office personnel are spending inordinate amounts of time chasing up missing pages and assignments that have not been submitted.

Teachers need to insist on a careful process of proofreading which will then reduce the current serious problems in the submission of these prepared assignments.

**Higher and standard level internal assessment**

**Administration**

Nevertheless, some of the problems that frequent IA were still in evidence—the wrong passages attached, extraneous background noises on the recordings, vague or inappropriate comments on the 1/IARF forms, passages with typographical errors, inappropriate information (page numbers, act/scene numbers, notes, etc.), lack of line numbers, or of inappropriate length.

**The range and suitability of the work submitted**

Guiding questions were nearly always included, though some were so general as to be worthless or so specific as to give away information that should be generated by the candidate (e.g., "How does Keats use imagery to communicate the cyclical and ceaseless nature of existence?" or "How is diction used in a way that surprises the reader in employing language that is not regularly associated with death?") Teachers should work on providing two questions that will assist the candidate in settling into an analysis of the techniques and the content of his or her specific passage.

In some centres, even allowing for the randomness of the sample selection process, there did not seem to be an appropriate range of extracts from all Part 2 works

**Candidate performance against each criterion**

**A: Knowledge and Understanding of extract of Work(s)**

While most candidates seemed to have had at least an adequate understanding of their extracts, others struggled, especially with passages from Shakespeare. Establishing context continued to be problematic, though more candidates seemed to be aware of the need to incorporate context this session and some did an excellent job of integrating contextual details throughout the entirety of the commentary. Contextual elements were more readily offered in the genres other than poetry; candidates rarely referred to other poems studied. Several moderators commented that candidates seemed to have a pre-learned introduction in which they offered biographical or background information that had no direct relevance to the extract under discussion. Additionally, such information sounded rehearsed and remote from the remainder of the commentary.

**B: Interpretation and Personal Response**

A common characteristic in this criterion was for candidates to offer a paraphrase or explication of the passage with, perhaps, a focus on characterization or theme. True analysis of language was often woefully absent. Plays were frequently treated as novels and nonfiction was treated as fiction. Other candidates offered interpretations that lacked textual support or that were based on misreading. One team leader noted: “Rarely did the candidates appreciate how the creative choices made by the writers were artistically unified.” Overall, most examiners felt that teachers ―over-rewarded marks in this area.

**For all candidates:**

Candidates should know their works well; there is no shortcut here. The reduced number of works to be studied at HL should make it easier for candidates to know the works intimately.

Teachers must make the oral commentary a central aspect of teaching the programme; candidates need to be thoroughly comfortable with the oral examination format long before the day when the IOC is to be recorded.

Now, more than ever, candidates must identify themselves at the outset of the recording by their name and candidate number.

**Higher level paper one**

**Interpretation**

There was some evidence of candidates gaining a greater confidence in putting forward a personal response in their commentaries, and thus sometimes scoring more highly under Criterion B.

However, many still seemed determined to detect a ‘theme‘ (see later re the misuse of this word), ‘message‘ or “hidden meaning‘ in the passage, hastily jumping to a premature conclusion based upon one or two minor points, and from there developing a whole thesis which imposed an interpretation regardless of anything which failed to fit their thesis and, in so doing, severely impeding their ability to show an understanding of the passage. To quote one examiner: ―Linking their ideas to the actual text should become a rule. Every time an idea is proposed a question must always be answered first: ‘Where in the text?‘ If it cannot be answered then the candidate has to rethink or rephrase the idea.‖

**Literary Features**

Many scripts demonstrated systematic, well integrated analysis of the effects of the literary features, with candidates in some centres in command of literary terms and able clearly to identify features and discuss their effects.

However, time and again examiners noted that candidates identified features, but could not go beyond general assertion to analyse their effects. Spotting literary devices and conventions, or quoting from the passage, is not in itself commentary. Candidates need to remember that any aspect of form is there because it has a function, and the moment that they begin to comment on the effect of a device is the moment that their analysis begins to become effective and score higher marks.

With regard to the prose, few candidates seemed to appreciate that presenting and building a character is a part of literary technique.

Candidates often scored only modestly under Criterion C because they failed to consider the poem as a poem, bearing in mind its form. A frequent examiner comment at the end of a commentary was "Little sense of the text as a poem".

**The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions**

With both the prose extract and the poem, candidates weakened their responses with general and mundane expressions that did not demonstrate clear understanding. Phrases such as

“This author uses great diction creating a good flow for the reader,’‖ and “This was very simple to understand with easy to read language,’‖ were disappointingly common.

**Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates I**

Candidates should be encouraged to:

* prepare as thoroughly for the prose and its conventions as for the poetry;
* study carefully the Descriptors and their demands in preparation for the examination, and realize that all aspects covered by the criteria are important;
* study a range of sample papers and have practice scoring Paper 1 commentaries from past years;
* develop an overview of the passage before starting to write - read (re-reading time is never wasted) – think - and plan;
* make sure to read and absorb the whole passage before writing anything - the commentary must treat the entire passage or the entire poem;
* think for longer and write less. Scripts of eleven, twelve and more pages are frequently poorly organized. A shorter paper can be just as effective and score highly on presentation when a well-developed argument lends an effective structure to the commentary.
* avoid vague, general introductions - begin with an argument which is based on an analysis of the passage, and stay tied to it throughout the commentary;
* put down the pen and re-read the first paragraph after writing it - Is it a good overview of what the passage is saying and the means by which it is said?
* consider the whole prose or poem and not leave gaps in analysis;
* address the form of the passage - that is, the prose as a piece of prose and the poem as a poem;
* recognise ambiguity, and appreciate that there does not have to be a conclusive answer;
* ensure that they understand the meaning of the words ‗theme‘ and ‗tone‘, both of which
* are frequently misused - not every idea is a “theme‘;
* use clear language and avoid technical naming of parts unless totally in command of nomenclature;
* always support comments by reference to the text, preferably citing the line(s);
* give line numbers, indeed, when quoting anything of substance from the text;
* learn how to integrate quotations, and how to cite verse - if quoting more than one line of continuous verse, insert slash marks at the end of lines to indicate an awareness of the verse form;
* if the gender of a narrator/persona is unclear, decide on the gender and stick to it, using the appropriate pronoun thereafter and thus avoiding the inappropriate use of ‗their‘ as a singular
* do more work on how to write a good conclusion - sometimes candidates ran out of ideas or repeated previous observations, without a sense of drawing ideas together into an overview;
* write legibly - that which cannot be read, cannot be credited;
* dot “i‘s and cross “t‘s - lack of this can make the work of some candidates difficult to read - try deciphering the word “inimical‘ when the dots are missing - the dots on the i‘s are there for a reason;
* learn to spell “simile‘ (not “similie‘);
* read the poem aloud in their heads, so that they can “hear‘ its sounds. Visits to poetry readings, or being frequently exposed to poets reading their work through the use of CD or DVD, might help in this regard.
* find out the accurate meaning of “personification‘. It is not the same as “anthropomorphisation‘.

**Candidates should be encouraged not to:**

* decide which task they are going to do (prose or verse) before the examination;
* guess or try to impose a "meaning" which cannot be evidenced;
* paraphrase - it is not the same as interpretation, and repetition of content is a waste of time;
* speculate upon the aim of the writer (an intentional fallacy – we cannot be sure of a writer's intentions - we can only know what a narrator/persona or characters think/say/do);
* use the passage as a springboard to personal or general philosophical reflection - the commentary is a close reading exercise in literary analysis and appreciation, not a sociological exploration;
* write their conclusion in the first paragraph of the commentary, i.e. stating from the outset that they know what the poem is about or means. They may start with first impressions, but the conclusions should be left until a thorough exploration of the poem has taken place. This will make the argument stronger and the interpretation more persuasive;
* make obvious comments such as 'This passage conveys its meaning through language and diction' (How else?) or 'This passage uses punctuation'. (While on rare occasions particular uses of punctuation may be deemed to be a literary device and worthy of comment, far too many candidates seem to feel that this is *the* major literary device.);
* use the abbreviation “quote‘ as a noun in formal writing;
* write that enjambment / rhyme / etc. help the poem “flow‘, which is almost meaningless;
* use “symbolic of‘ when 'suggests' is meant;
* use “incredibly‘ unless “beyond belief‘ is really meant;
* say “an example would be‘ for “an example is‘;

**Further comments:**

* Sharing relevant sections of the Subject Report is an excellent teaching tool for candidates at the appropriate time.
* Centres should be reminded to read all the IBO publications and advice concerning how to tackle the commentary.

**Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates II**

The comments above, particularly in the first section, should make clear some steps which might lead to better results; they are briefly summarized below. Teachers should encourage their candidates to do the following:

* Take time to read, re-read and consider the essential meaning of the passage or poem before putting pen to paper.
* Avoid formulaic openings listing a ―theme‖ and (often three) ―devices‖, frequently ignored thereafter.
* Be specific on how the writer‘s use of literary devices gives meaning and effect.
* Be open to the possibility of writing on either the prose passage or the poem.
* Use literary terminology only when it is well understood and apt—and always discuss the impact of the use of techniques.
* Consider what actually happens in the piece before (possibly) moving to a more symbolic or abstract interpretation of its implications.
* Avoid paraphrase and summary; use close and well-supported analysis.
* Use aptly chosen quotations in support of points, integrate them smoothly, and then explore their significance and the ways they support your points.
* Learn to use paragraphs intelligently.
* Recognize and use an appropriate register for literary analysis.

One examiner made the particular plea that candidates need to be reminded of the essential link between content and style. They should be aware of the range of techniques available to the writer and then consider the choices made in the given instance. The use of the chosen devices must be analyzed in terms of contribution to meaning.

Another examiner pleaded that teachers should avoid encouraging candidates to use the commentary as a platform for an ideological response but urge them to focus on personal interpretation carefully supported with well-integrated quoted evidence.

**Paper 2 SL**

**1. Length of a response and development of an idea**

The length of a response is not always, and often is not at all, a reliable standard by which to judge the knowledge and understanding behind it. Still it is probably some indication of what the teacher has set as a standard. In reality, neither short papers (say, three or fewer sides which usually indicate a lack of knowledge or commitment to task, or both) nor long ones (say, 13 or more sides, often only physically possible to write when then has been little to no planning) achieve best results – although, of course, there are those excellent exceptions to which many writers of very short and very long papers no doubt feel they will belong but usually do not. One of the most frequently mentioned weak points by examiners is the lack of detailed reference. In general, it is most effective to choose three or four moments within a work and then go into great detail with them rather than to select from a series of details spread throughout the work, or retell everything important ever said about the work but which carry an unclear or simply narrative central thread tying them together.

**2. Attention to literary device**

Some centres submit papers that are fine on all counts except criterion C as if the style of presentation had not ever been a matter of discussion. On the other hand, in some centres candidates name devices in the introductions and that list becomes the outline for the discussion, sometimes at the expense of other criteria and other devices that actually are more significant for the work in question, not to mention the question itself. This element, the current criterion C, will be of increased importance as we move into the English A: Literature course in which literary convention plays THE central role. ALL teachers will have to adjust their teaching in one way or another to accommodate the requirements of the new criteria.

**3. Mechanics and presentation**

Although grammatical precision is by no means linked in complete parallel fashion to accomplishment, there is a noticeable pattern of attention to detail that inhabits papers on many levels: correct standard mechanical English (spelling, punctuation, subject/verb agreement etc.), distinguishing titles of works by underlining or inverted commas, knowing the correct spelling of titles and authors‘ names, handwriting. On this last point one does not expect teachers at this level to instruct in handwriting. However, it is very possible that a teacher never actually sees a candidate‘s handwriting, what with most papers being produced on a word processor these days, until the actual writing of the exam – something the teacher does not actually see either. It would help many candidates to practise handwriting in regular assignments; and if the situation is beyond help, teachers should notify the DP Coordinator or Special Needs Counsellor so that a timely request for the use of a computer (with or without spell-check) could be requested. This accommodation gives the candidates a better chance to show what he/she knows and understands than handwriting that is tiny or illegible, or both.

**4. Need for functional planning**

Although it is not required and not even wanted in general, many candidates attach their planning to the response. It neither contributes nor detracts from the mark. However, over time its inclusion has indicated that “functional planning‘ is a very useful step in the process. Non-functional planning‘ includes the names of two works, a couple of bubbles or lines containing perhaps the name of the character and maybe one or two sub-bubbles or lines. This type of sketchy outline does little more than identify the texts to be treated and the characters or situations to be addressed.

Another form of “non-functional planning‘ is the very elaborate sort with all kinds of hooks and arrows and whatnot, so many that it probably took the candidate half the exam time to compose it. The first sort gives not enough direction and the second too much to be realized in the remaining 45 minutes.

Planning is a skill that needs practice: deconstructing the question, choosing the (two?) works to be addressed, making a decision of what three or four moments from each text will be discussed in detail (really no time to put down those details here), ordering those texts and details in what is thought to be the most effective order. The most effective order is usually not the order that the examples are thought of although this is the type of order one often sees when there is little planning. The texts are not necessarily treated in the order that they were read in class although this also frequently seems to be the case. The order is also probably not the most effective when the strongest examples are given first. In fact, there is every reason to believe that an essay that builds to its most effective examples, and provides true transitions along the way, is likely to have an internal direction which goes a long way to scoring highly on presentation. Candidates often use their best examples first because they are perhaps afraid of running out of time. All the more reason to spend time practising planning.

**The areas of the programme and examination that appeared difficult for the candidates**

* If a candidate is going to quote a work, it should be accurate; otherwise make it a paraphrase.
* Many transitions are not only trite but also inaccurate to what follows and should be challenged in practicing revision: ―similarly‖, ―on the other hand‖, ―just the same as‖, completely the opposite‖, ―moving on‖, ―interestingly‖ are some examples of these ofte non-functional transitions.
* Challenge the words and phrases ―relate to‖, ―relatable‖, ―positive‖, ―negative‖, ―flow‖ (unless the subject has something to do with something that flows like a river, blood or molten lava). I am sure you can make your own list of words and phrases that ought to hit the word graveyard.
* Candidates need to define the terms in the question. Even with literary conventions it will help if candidates state what they believe the term means.
* Plot summary is no substitute for analysis.