

Unfortunately, there were, once again, candidates writing this examination who had not studied the prescribed collection of short stories that is examined in this paper. This continues to be an extremely worrying and, seemingly, insoluble problem. One wonders why some adult learning centres and colleges have ignored a recent Departmental circular drawing attention to this matter, not to mention the obvious reminders and information in examiners' reports, past Senior Certificate question papers, subject guidelines and the annual lists of English prescribed works issued by the Department.

As in previous years, the standard of writing of many of the candidates produced little evidence that they had been taught and required to practise the types of writing required in this paper. Furthermore, there were, once again, candidates who should not have been attempting to write any Senior Certificate English paper, let alone English First Language. These were candidates who did not understand any of the questions, whose scripts were incomprehensible, and who should, instead, have been taking courses in basic English.

There were also far too many candidates this year who did not number their answers – an annoying situation for the examiner, who must record marks next to the correct question numbers on the cover of the answer book, and a hazardous omission for those candidates whose response displays tenuous links with more than one topic.

The following are my comments on how the individual questions in the 2005 paper were answered:

Section A

Question 1 was a popular choice, but there was a tendency among many candidates to ignore both the example given in the paper and the instruction that this should be a descriptive piece. Too many candidates wrote of a pleasant or unpleasant experience they had had as a result of personal interaction with a particular person.

Question 2 produced some good writing, but also some muddled writing, with candidates drifting aimlessly between longing for the past and looking eagerly to the future. Candidates adopting a clear-cut approach to this topic were rare.

The third question, on the topic of abortion, produced some impressive writing in which strong opinions were expressed with sincerity. Teachers should remind candidates that even those candidates who struggle with the mechanics of the language often manage to score a good rating for CONTENT when they write with sincerity and conviction. In this connection, it would be a productive classroom exercise if teachers familiarised future candidates with the assessment grids used to mark this paper. They are available on the WCED Website in the section containing previous Senior Certificate question papers and their memos.

Too many of the candidates who chose to answer Question 4 forgot to include the given sentence in the text. Others used it as a heading, or altered it before incorporating it in the text. Please remind all candidates that instructions are meant to be followed.

Question 5 did not prove to be a popular question. I found this surprising, as private candidates in previous years seemed to enjoy reminiscing about important life-changing decisions they had made.

There was slight increase this year in the number of candidates attempting a response to visual stimuli. The most popular choice in Question 6 was Annexure B, with the typical response recounting the writer's childhood memories.

Section B

Question 7 was extremely popular, but far too many candidates presented a vague, poorly structured letter which would certainly have confused the recipient. Candidates should try to write the sort of letter they themselves would like to receive from a prospective employer. Such a letter should be clear, concise and welcoming in tone. They should also have realised that this was meant to be a letter offering employment, not an instruction to turn up for work on Monday!

As regards Question 8, teachers must emphasise to candidates that diary entries are not running commentaries spoken into a portable tape recorder, but a recording in writing (at the end of day) of the day's events and one's thoughts and feelings about these. A sentence such as the following is, therefore, entirely inappropriate: "At the moment I am climbing a tree to escape the lion."

Most of candidates who attempted the letter to the press in Question 9 were unfamiliar with the format and style of this type of writing. There was also tendency among many candidates to discuss the HIV/AIDS pandemic in general terms, even though the question required them to focus on the questionable attitude of the popular media to HIV/AIDS.

The newspaper reports written in response to Question 10 were frequently not news reports. Instead, these candidates produced poorly constructed mini-essays in which they offered opinions on the abilities of either women drivers or police officers. Teachers must ensure that their candidates know the difference between a news report, which reports the latest news, and a newspaper article, which presents researched information and opinions on some topic.

Section C

In their attempts to answer Question 11, quite a number of candidates had no idea of what was meant by the *script* of a radio advertisement. Instead, they often produced a few instructions to the radio station on how to present the advertisement over the air. Remind candidates that they should not attempt to answer a question if they are not absolutely sure about what is required.

Responses to Question 12 were, on the whole, satisfactory, with candidates offering some sensible advice on saving water.

Most answers to Question 13 were very disappointing. Instructions to head office were often so vague that the recipient would have had to send an e-mail in reply requesting clarification on such matters as the reason for the shortage, the materials required and delivery arrangements.

Section D

As I said at the beginning of this report, many candidates knew nothing about these stories. Consequently, they scored few, if any, marks. A creative response must demonstrate insight into the story and also include references to the characters and events portrayed in it.

Responses to Question 14 were frequently unconvincing, with many candidates not producing stories in keeping with the style, spirit and period of the original story.

As far as Question 15 was concerned, the number of responses that displayed a reasonable competence in punctuating and paragraphing direct speech could be counted on the fingers of one hand. (Even the example of direct speech provided in the quoted passage in Question 16 was of no apparent assistance!)

Question 16 produced the best answers in this section. Most of those candidates who had studied **Transitions** chose to answer this question.