

My general comments on this 2006 paper must begin with – I am sad to say – a repetition of what I find myself writing every year:

- There were still candidates who had not studied the prescribed collection of short stories that is examined in this paper. In spite of a Departmental circular drawing attention to this matter, comments in my examiner's reports over the years, past Senior Certificate question papers, subject guidelines and the annual lists of English prescribed works issued by the Department, the problem continues.
- The standard of writing of many of the candidates produced little evidence that they are familiar with the types of writing required in this paper. Few candidates knew how to write in play form in Question 15, while an alarming number wrote letters without addresses, dates, salutations, subject lines or the appropriate closure.
- There were 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.
- Many candidates still do not number their answers – an annoying situation for the examiner, who must record marks next to question numbers on the cover of the answer book, and a hazardous omission for those candidates whose responses displays tenuous links with more than one topic.

This year I wish to add two more appeals to teachers:

- Please try to inculcate in your students some understanding of appropriate register. There were many answers requiring a formal register which were written in a sloppy, informal style, sprinkled with words and phrases like "bucks" (instead of "rands"), "you guys", "thanx", "wanna", "gonna", "we'd all get wasted like there's no tomorrow" and "the geyser packed up". Also, please impress upon tell your classes that SMS abbreviations, such as "u" (instead of "you") and "y" (instead of "why"), may not be used in this paper.
- Please teach punctuation. Many candidates have not yet realised that punctuation contains important signals to the reader and, if carelessly used, can result in one saying what one did not intend. (I encountered one candidate in these exams who wrote an essay of approximately 300 words which consisted of only one sentence and no punctuation!)

The following are my comments on how the individual questions in the 2006 paper were answered:

Section A

Question 1 was a very popular choice, but there was a tendency among many candidates to ignore the specific aspect of HIV/Aids they were asked to discuss. Instead of concentrating on the question of whether the disease should be a notifiable one, they rambled on about various other aspects of HIV/Aids. They ignored the examiner's guiding questions: "Do you find this acceptable? Is it a potentially dangerous situation? Is it fair to all concerned?"

Interestingly, Question 2 often produced accounts of the writer's first bungee jump – a perfectly acceptable interpretation of the topic. The sensations experienced, as they plummeted into the space below, were often graphically described. However, there were some candidates who ignored the word "moment" in the title and, instead of telling of a brief experience, proceeded to describe a prolonged period of "madness", sometimes stretching over years.

The third question, on the topic of cellphone usage, was satisfactorily done by most of those who attempted it. However, as with Question 1, some candidates did not follow the instructions provided and gave little attention to describing what they felt would be courteous and considerate cellphone use.

Question 4 gave rise to a short stories containing a fair amount of direct speech. Unfortunately, there were very few candidates who knew how to paragraph and punctuate direct speech with any degree of confidence. Also, some of those who attempted this question ignored the instruction on the question paper which stipulated that they had to write a "short story". Please remind all candidates that instructions are meant to be followed.

The Question 5 topic appealed to quite a number of candidates and there were some interesting accounts of candidates' personal experiences under difficult conditions.

Very few candidates attempted a response to the visual stimuli. Nevertheless, the picture in Annexure 6.2 provided some authentic accounts of either fishing from a boat or the lives of Western Cape fisherfolk.

Section B

Question 7 was a very popular choice, but far too many candidates presented a poorly structured letter whingeing on and on about their dreadful living conditions. A letter of this sort requires a succinct and accurate description of each problem being experienced and a brief, concluding with a request for repairs to be carried out. Candidates should also note that neither the fawning nor the threatening approach will be successful in this kind of situation. Also, it was meant to be a formal letter – the question paper stated this.

Most candidates who attempted the informal letter in Question 8 seemed very hesitant about giving constructive advice. It should be emphasised to candidate that, when choosing a topic, they must be sure that they have a number of sensible things to say. They should not fall into the trap of choosing

a topic because it “looks easy”, only to find out that they are at a loss for ideas.

Although there were very few responses to Question 9, those who did attempt it were writing from personal experience. This gave them confidence, which showed itself in their writing.

There were only two responses to Question 10 – perhaps this was because candidates were unsure of what was meant by “editorial”.

Section C

Many of the answers to Question 11 contained some sensible instructions, but these were too often expressed in clumsy language. Some candidates wrote contradictory instructions, e.g. “Stay calm”, followed later by “Run as fast as you can down the stairs”.

Responses to Question 12 were, on the whole, most disappointing. Too many the labels were unimaginative, untidily drawn, contained illegible wording, or lacked vital information. Simply labelling the product “Jam” is insufficient; it needs to be something like “Strawberry Jam”. The consumer needs such basic information.

While there were some good answers to Question 13, many candidates provided news reports given after the event. They were meant to provide the opening words to a running commentary in which they would, as the question stated, “ ... describe and explain what the listeners cannot see”. Unfortunately, some of those candidates who did provide a live commentary tried to cover the whole match!

Section D

The instructions, in bold type, at the beginning of this section requested candidates to demonstrate familiarity with the story, and to refer to characters, information and events in the story. They were also asked to attempt to capture something of the story’s atmosphere. Unfortunately, few succeeded in doing this. The following, for example, occurred frequently:

- Letters in response to Question 14 beginning with a Western Cape address. (Hajji Hassen lived in Newtown, Johannesburg, not Bellville!)
- Answers to Question 15 which displayed no knowledge at all of Thoba’s “strange behaviour”.
- Descriptions of Teslaarsdal that reflected little knowledge or understanding of the story and its setting.