

When preparing candidates who will sit for this paper in May-June 2008, general reading skills, (skimming and scanning), making predictions, formulating and voicing an opinion, and putting something into your own words are some of the skills that need to be focused on. Teachers will also have to prepare candidates for answering inferential- or higher order questions.

Section A

Question 1 (The comprehension)

1. A variety of question types were used in the comprehension question. Many candidates did not seem to be able to read, understand and respond appropriately to them. Candidates must be familiar with different types of questions, and be trained in exam technique so that they present their responses in an appropriate manner. They include the following:
 - *TRUE or FALSE questions: Quote to substantiate*
 - Make sure that they answer using the words TRUE or FALSE. They must not use the words YES or NO
 - They must use quotation marks when quoting.
 - They must be taught to quote briefly – if not told how many words to quote, they should never quote more than one sentence. The quote must contain the exact words from the passage. They must not misspell, omit or misquote words.
 - *Rewrite or explain in your own words*
If the candidate merely lifts sections from the text, he or she will be penalised.
 - *Questions requiring an answer in a certain number of words, a phrase, a sentence, an expression or in consecutive words.*
 - Candidates often do NOT read and follow the instruction.
 - *Inferential questions*
 - What was immensely pleasing was that quite a few candidates managed these higher order questions well. A few brilliantly creative answers were presented.
 - The vast majority, however, simply quoted from the text in response to these questions.
2. Tips for Candidates:
 - Read the question properly or you will answer incorrectly.
 - Read the passages through at least twice before attempting the questions.
 - Be familiar with all 3 levels of interpretation. Remember that some answers are stated clearly in the text (direct reference), some can be worked out by looking at certain information in the text (inference), but for the rest you will have to read between the lines (supposition).

Section B

The Summary

This question was answered well. For the most part, candidates were able to

- understand the text (the passage);
- tell the difference between a main idea and supporting ideas ;
- extract and write down the idea required;
- write that idea in their own words; and
- write all the main ideas in point form.

Tips for Candidates:

- When asked to write in point form, remember that each new point should be written in a new line.
- Use numbers to indicate each new point.
- Each point must be a full sentence.
- Use your own words as far as possible.
- Write down the number of words used in brackets at the end of the summary.
- Do NOT give your own views or opinions about what you have read in the passage.

Section C

Language Usage

One way in which to address poor performance in this section – particularly in Question 3 this year – is to say, rather obviously, but vaguely, that teachers must teach language structures. While this is not necessarily bad advice, it does not address the possible root cause of poor performance.

Statistically, one could reasonably take the view that candidates who fared well in this section were candidates who were familiar and comfortable with English as a language. Put in progressive terms, the challenge for English language teachers working at centres where candidates fared poorly, is to make candidates familiar and comfortable with the language. The ideal would be a situation where a learner (who speaks English as an additional language), instinctively “feels” that a sentence, word or expression is either wrong, better, not suitable, without necessarily knowing which rule has been followed or broken. While this is undoubtedly a tall order, teachers need to be well prepared and have a clear plan of action as far as language teaching is concerned.

In order to do well in this section, teachers should have covered the following areas (and more) in their classrooms:

- *Grammar*, e.g. direct & indirect speech, active & passive voice, concord, tense forms, punctuation
- *Functions of language*, e.g. how to apologise, how to change a statement into a question (and vice versa), how to deny/negate a statement
- *How to understand & use resources*, e.g. dictionaries, encyclopaedias, timetables, tables

Other Comments

- Candidates should be regularly exposed to good writing that is suitable for their cognitive levels. This exposure should be constant, deliberate and structured. In other words, teachers cannot assume that candidates will quickly, of their own volition or naturally discern the features of good writing in a text. It must be carefully and constantly pointed out to them.
- Examples of good English writing must be read aloud in class. Candidates must learn to appreciate the cadences of the language in spoken form.
- Teaching features of the language must be integrated in creative writing lessons. This will enable the teacher, when marking the creative piece, to give feedback on a learner’s comprehension of the language structure that was taught in class. Moreover, this will then not be a case of merely “right or wrong” (as is so often the case with a language exercise); candidates will be able to use, and see the use of, a language structure in context.