



3850 Certificate in English

Chief Examiner's Report

June 2020

(Delayed examinations sat – August & October 2020)

**3850 Certificate in English
Chief Examiner's Report – October 2020**

Section 1 General Comments

2020 has proved to be a challenging year on a global basis and none less so for the 3850 qualification. This year has seen a small cohort, (23) candidates at Stage 2 sit the Media and Communications exam in August, another cohort across the stages (66) sit the Media and Communications paper in October and then over 2,306 candidates, the Lifestyle paper across the three stages.

The assessment covers Reading and Writing and candidates need to address both in order to gain a pass. Generally, candidates performed better on the Reading section than the Writing section, although there was clear evidence of a greater length of writing across all stages than in previous years. At Stage 1 on the October Lifestyle paper, 72% achieved the writing length mark, at Stage 2, 96% and at Stage 3, 97%. This was also evidenced in the two smaller cohorts. It is important to note that while most passed on the Reading with some Writing marks, a number achieved more marks in the Writing section than in previous years.

There was a significant improvement in teaching and learning across all three stages for all cohorts, in both the Reading and the Writing sections. The candidates who sat the August and October (Media and Communications) paper achieved 100% pass rate at Stages 1 and 3 and 98% pass rate at Stage 2. These candidates achieved a high level of merits and distinctions.

The October paper (Lifestyle) had an overall pass rate at Stage 1 of 82%, at Stage 2, 85% and at Stage 3, 92%. Of note were the increased number of merits and distinctions compared to previous years, which possibly reflected the presence of more mature candidates, as well as the teaching and learning that had taken place. At Stage 1, 39% achieved a merit and 6% a distinction, Stage 2, 46% achieved a merit and 17% a distinction and at Stage 3, 52% achieved a merit and 15% a distinction.

There was evidence of a wide range of age groups who sat the exam, at all three stages.

The topics for both the Media and Communications paper and the Lifestyle paper appeared to be accessible to most candidates as demonstrated by the length of the candidates' writing.

Most candidates appeared to have been entered for the appropriate level, although there was evidence that some candidates found the Stage 3 paper challenging.

Section 2 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Reading

At each stage candidates demonstrated an understanding of and were engaged with the source documents. There was little or no evidence of candidates becoming confused as to which source document to refer to when answering the questions.

There were only a few candidates that copied out sentences or paragraphs in answer to questions that required one word, or short, answers. This should continue to be stressed to candidates, otherwise too much time is wasted writing out whole sentences or paragraphs.

There was a marked improvement across all stages in understanding the purpose of text, demonstrating teaching and learning across all levels.

There was also evidence of teaching and learning in respect of organisational features of layout. However, many candidates put examples eg, they wrote out the whole title or subheading and did not identify the name of the feature eg, 'title' or 'subheading', which would attract the marks.

As in previous years, some candidates gave features that they have possibly been taught, which were not related to the source document and did not gain marks.

The punctuation and grammar questions in the reading section are still proving difficult for a number of candidates, who do not read the question carefully and often insert random punctuation.

Candidates need to be made aware of the number of marks allocated to a question, as stated on the question paper, as some only give one or two answers for three marks. Candidates are not penalised for writing one, two or three answers on the same line, but they must be made aware of the mark allocation per question.

Candidates should also be aware that all answers are to be found in the source documents and are not to draw on own experience or prior knowledge.

**Stage 1
Reading**

Over 50% of candidates were able to answer most of the questions, which is a slight improvement on previous years. These candidates achieved at least one mark where multiple marks were available.

96% of candidates achieved the full three marks for the form, as per last year, and the same percentage gained marks for circling an instruction and signing their name, as in the last series. The sentence on the form continues to be challenging each year, with a lack of end of sentence punctuation, inappropriate capitals at the start of or within a word and sentences not making grammatical sense.

Filling in name, address and telephone number; writing a sentence using correct spelling, punctuation and grammar; circling an instruction and signing to say the sentence has been checked for accuracy attracts 31% of the reading marks. It was observed that the more mature students were able to gain full marks in this section.

As in previous years, candidates were asked to find a spelling error in the first and last paragraph (or box at the end). This question was clearly signposted as it has been on sample papers and in previous series. While there was a slight improvement in candidates finding the first spelling error, an increase of 5%, there was a 50% decrease in the candidates who were able to locate and find the correct word in the final paragraph (or box at the end).

There was a significant improvement in candidates understanding the purpose of the text and the main point, but it is still important that teaching and learning takes place around the different formats of text and the language that each uses.

In respect of relating an image to print, there was a noticeable improvement in the number of candidates answering this correctly, from 55% in 2019 to 72% in the October 2020 paper. In the 2020 series, candidates were required to select a caption from a multiple-choice rubric, which appeared to suit this cohort, but it is still important that candidates can differentiate between an instructional, descriptive and explanatory text for future papers. Putting the image alongside the question has made this question more accessible for candidates.

There was a noticeable number of candidates who found it difficult to scan to locate information or read in detail. There was a decrease of 29% from the previous series. Candidates need to read questions carefully and locate the information in the text rather than just picking out individual words or phrases that they believe to be correct without reading the whole text.

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| | <p>The dictionary question continues to be an issue for some candidates who ‘make up’ answers or use their own words, rather than referring to a dictionary. 72% achieved this mark in 2019 with 61% in the October 2020 paper.</p> <p>Year on year there has been an improvement in reading and understanding different types of words and this year 91% achieved the full two marks compared to 78% in 2019.</p> <p>It is important that candidates are aware that spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessed in the reading section.</p> |
| <p>Stage 2 Reading</p> | <p>There was a noticeable improvement in the number of candidates who were able to identify the main purpose of a document from 37% in 2019 to 61% in the October 2020 series. A significant number of candidates, 72%, were able to use different strategies to locate information. It is evident that teaching and learning has taken place.</p> <p>Organisational features remain a challenge as detailed above. These are three marks that can be easily achieved if candidates have been taught about layout features and the name of each one. 40% of candidates did not achieve a mark for this question. As stated in previous years, centres need to become acquainted with the Marker Guidance to familiarise themselves with the type of answers required in order to teach candidates what they should be looking for. The sample papers are a useful tool to achieve this.</p> <p>There were some candidates who were writing out, for example, the titles and subheadings, rather than giving the answer as ‘title/subheadings’. The way to approach this question is an important teaching and learning issue, as candidates continue to lose a valuable three marks through a lack of understanding of what is required or by not attempting the question, at all.</p> <p>The result for identifying the main points remains the same as last year; it is important that candidates read the whole document before answering this question and do not just pick up on key words.</p> <p>There was a slight improvement in the number of candidates who achieved the mark for the dictionary question, although it was noticeable that a number of candidates had not used a dictionary or possibly did not have access to one.</p> <p>Identifying information proved challenging for a number of candidates, especially for Q10. Again, this may be due to candidates not reading the question in detail.</p> <p>91% of candidates achieved the mark for word structure and this percentage has continued to increase since the new format for this question was introduced in 2019.</p> <p>Determining meaning from images which is not directly stated in the text, proved challenging this year. Candidates should be aware that the image could be a picture, graph, diagram or symbol.</p> <p>The number of candidates achieving the full two marks for the grammar question rose from 37% in 2019 to 88% in the October 2020 series. This is an excellent result and only 11% of candidates did not achieve at least one mark.</p> |

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| | <p>The punctuation question in the reading section continues to prove challenging for a number of candidates. 58% achieved two marks in 2019 compared to 43% in the October 2020 series. Question marks in particular do not appear to be understood by candidates as a choice of punctuation marker to end a sentence, where appropriate. As in the Writing section, candidates are only assessed on start of sentence capitalisation, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks as end of sentence punctuation markers and capitals for proper nouns. Many candidates are inserting random commas and apostrophes when these are not being assessed at this level.</p> <p>There continues to be a significant improvement in candidates answering the question and not copying out sentences or paragraphs when only a word, words or a phrase are required. This will help with the time spent on the Reading section and potentially give candidates more time to address their writing and to proof read their work. It is important that candidates are aware that spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessed in the Reading section.</p> |
| <p>Stage 3 Reading</p> | <p>Again, this year there were a significant number of candidates who were able to identify the main purpose of the document, from 69% in 2019 to 94% in the October 2020 series. It is important for teaching and learning to continue to take place around the formats and language used for each of these, in order that candidates are to be able to identify the different purposes.</p> <p>As mentioned above, organisational features continue to remain a challenge but in October 2020, 70% of candidates achieved at least one mark compared to 56% in 2019. As stated in previous years, centres need to become acquainted with the Marker Guidance to familiarise themselves with the type of answers required and to teach candidates what they should be looking for. The sample papers are a useful tool to achieve this.</p> <p>The format introduced in 2019 for candidates to identify the main points appears to have made this question more accessible and 66% achieved the full three marks compared to 5% in 2019. It is important that candidates read the whole of the source document before attempting this question and do not just pick out key words that they believe may be the answer. Again, the sample papers are a useful teaching aid.</p> <p>There was a noticeable decrease in the number of candidates who were able to identify specific detail from the source documents in both the August and October 2020 sittings. There was a reduction from 82% to 61% of candidates who achieved the full 3 marks. Candidates need to be aware of the need for detailed reading and not, again, to look for key words or what they think is the answer. All questions and answers relate to the source document and do not require prior knowledge or drawing from own experience or beliefs.</p> <p>The question relating to synonyms continues to prove challenging. Candidates need to be aware that the replacement word is a grammatical 'fit', although this question does not assess grammar. 64% of candidates gave an incorrect answer for one of the synonyms. This was because it could be an alternative but was not correct in the particular context or did not make grammatical sense in the sentence given.</p> <p>The dictionary question remains challenging. A number of candidates did not identify if the word to be defined was a noun, adjective or verb in the October 2020 series</p> |

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| | <p>(although this is seen through all series), and a few candidates did not have a dictionary to refer to.</p> <p>The grammar question in the Reading section returned the same result as 2019 and there was an improvement in the punctuation question in this section of the Reading, with only 7% of candidates receiving none of the three marks. Candidates need to be made aware of the Stage 3 criteria for punctuation assessment, as some were using semi-colons and colons that are not assessed at this level.</p> <p>Overall, there continues to be a noticeable change where candidates now understand that they just need to answer the question and not write whole paragraphs or sentences to provide an answer. It is important that candidates are aware that spelling, punctuation and grammar are not assessed in the Reading section.</p> |
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| Section 3 Performance relating to specific assessment criteria – Writing | |
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| Stage 1 Writing | Plan | <p>33% of candidates produced an appropriate plan compared to 37% in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates need to be aware that they must address each of the bullet points and not just copy the bullet points given, into the space allocated for their plan. • The plan needs to reflect the bullet points and can be just one word or a phrase. Some candidates were putting an introduction, a middle and an end for the plan (with nothing alongside this) or dividing the space for the plan up into four segments and numbering each one. This does not attract the mark for a plan. • In the October 2020 paper, for example, candidates needed to address in their plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. what (you would like to learn) – hairdressing 2. why (you want to learn this) – like to be creative 3. where (you can learn this) – HEART <p>This is all that is required from candidates to achieve the mark. They do not have to write what, why or where or number the points, but just indicate they have understood what the plan requires and show that it will inform their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no set format for the plan, but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan. • A number of candidates use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks and wastes the time that candidates need to complete their actual writing. |
| | Length minimum 75 words | <p>72% of candidates who produced a piece of writing met the minimum word count of at least 75 words. Noticeably more candidates attempted the writing too.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that candidates write at sufficient length to potentially attract the maximum marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. • Equally, it is important to remember that writing more than 75 words can lead to additional errors. A number of |

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| | | <p>candidates wrote more than 100 words, but the control of SPaG and sequencing deteriorated as they attempted to write more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 1 candidates should practise their ability to write at least 75 words and check their writing for SPaG errors to achieve more marks. |
| | Content | <p>A similar number of candidates to the previous series addressed all three bullet points, but there was a slight increase of 6% who achieved two out of the three marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates who had planned their writing were more likely to cover all three points and stay on topic. • There were a small number of candidates who did not write on the topic provided. These candidates lost marks on plan and content but were still assessed on all other criteria for their writing ability. |
| | Legible writing | <p>Legibility continues to improve with 88% in October 2020 compared to 82% in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is extremely important that candidates use a black or blue pen. If a candidate is only able to write in pencil or crayon, special arrangements should be put in place. This point is stressed each year and this year there were a number of scripts where it was difficult to access the candidate's writing. |
| | Paragraphs | <p>There was a slight increase in the number of candidates who structured their writing in paragraphs from 27% to 30%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this Stage a minimum of two paragraphs need to be seen. This is a valuable mark and candidates should be made aware of the need for paragraphs in their writing. • As candidates continue to write longer pieces of text, it is even more important that their writing is structured in paragraphs. |
| | Sequencing | <p>85% of candidates sequenced their writing compared to 77% in 2019, which is a good result.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning assists with the sequencing of writing. |
| | Spelling | <p>There was a significant increase in the number of candidates who achieved the full two marks. 55% in the October 2020 series and 38% in 2019. This may be as a result of the noticeable amount of more mature students and a more able cohort in the smaller sittings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less text speak was evidenced, but there are still a number of spellings that reflect American and not Standard English. • The following frequent errors were noted: 'alot', 'apart' not 'a part', 'them selves', 'chief' not 'chef', 'cause' not 'because', 'writting' not 'writing', 'brakes' not 'breaks'. The use of short forms, Rd (road), St (Street), Ave (Avenue), pics (pictures), yrs (years) are all spelling errors. |

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| | Punctuation | <p>Unfortunately, punctuation remains poor with a decrease of candidates achieving the full two marks in October from 32% in 2019 to 24% in the October 2020 series.</p> <p>At this level, candidates need to understand the need for a capital letter at the start of the sentence and a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark at the end. Stage 1 candidates are not assessed on commas or apostrophes and should be advised of this, especially in relation to the punctuation question in the Reading section.</p> <p>Candidates also need to understand the difference between using a full stop or question mark at the end of the sentence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many candidates continue to use capital letters at the start of a word (that is not the start of a sentence or a proper noun) or within a word, which results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, A, C, F, H, J, K, L, M, O, S, T, P, V and W, although other letters are frequently incorrectly capitalised. • The use of ‘i’ as opposed to ‘I’ when candidates refer to themselves is still seen frequently and this contributes to the loss of punctuation marks. • If a candidate uses appropriate punctuation throughout their writing in respect of the start and end of the sentence, they could still lose all the punctuation marks, as a result of inappropriate use of capital letters. • Candidates need to use consistent punctuation throughout their writing. For example, in the Media and Communications paper, in one text, Social Media was seen written as Social Media, Social media, social Media, social media. |
| | Grammar | <p>Candidates’ ability to achieve one or two marks for grammar has declined. In 2019, 25% achieved the full two marks, in the October 2020 series only 17%, with little improvement in candidates achieving one mark.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As reported in previous years, the main issues continue to be subject verb agreement and inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural. For example, have, has (often seen as, ‘as’) and had, and the incorrect use of ‘a’ and ‘an’. • Definite and indefinite articles also appear to be a challenge. • There continues to be confusion with the use of the, they, there, their and they’re. • Of note in the October 2020 series was the inconsistent use of singular and plural. For example, ‘uses’ not ‘use’, ‘makes’ not ‘make’, ‘life’ not ‘lives’. |
| Stage 2 Writing | Plan | 41% of candidates attempted a plan, which is a slight improvement on 32% in 2019. However, this still meant that |

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| | | <p>the 59% of candidates who did not attempt a plan lost a potential two marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates need to be aware that they must address each of the bullet points and not just copy the bullet points given, into the space allocated for their plan. • The plan needs to reflect the bullet points and can be just one word or a phrase. Some candidates were putting an introduction, a middle and an end for the plan (with nothing alongside this) or dividing the space for the plan up into four segments and numbering each one. This does not attract the mark for a plan. • In the August 2020 paper, for example, candidates needed to address the rubric about Social Media: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. what (are the advantages) – contact family and friends 2. what (are the disadvantages) – no time with family 3. how (might you use in the future) – advertise my business <p>This is all that is required from candidates to achieve the mark(s). They do not have to write what, what or how or number the points, but just indicate that they have understood what the plan requires and show that it will inform their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no set format for the plan, but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan. • A number of candidates use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks and wastes the time that candidates need to complete their actual writing. |
| | <p>Length minimum 200 words</p> | <p>There was a significant increase in the number of candidates who achieved the mark for length. 67% in October 2020 compared to 43% in 2019. This is an excellent result, but some candidates continued to write 300+ words which resulted in a loss of control of other criteria and this was reflected in their overall mark for writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts of less than 200 words also have an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. • A number of candidates wrote more than 200 words, which resulted in many cases of ‘rambling’ and additional errors. • Candidates need to be aware that writing less than 99 words will have a marked effect on their logical sequence, language and SPaG marks. |
| | <p>Content</p> | <p>93% of candidates achieved at least one mark for content with 63% achieving the full three marks. This is a similar achievement to 2019. Candidates need to be aware that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They only have to address the three bullet points with a sentence and do not need to expand on the detail. • If candidates choose to write about something different than instructed by the rubric, they will still be able to gain marks for their writing, but not for the plan or content. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates who did a plan were more likely to achieve the content marks. |
| | Legible writing | <p>There was an improvement in legibility with 96% of candidates gaining the mark.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, there was an improvement in letter formation, but some candidates' writing was still difficult to decipher. • There were still issues with faint writing, as some candidates had not used blue or black pens. |
| | Paragraphs | <p>There was a significant improvement with 73% of candidates using paragraphs compared to 47% in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this level it is not assessed if a new paragraph has been used to demonstrate a change in Time, Place, Topic or Person. Candidates just need to show a use of paragraphs to break up their writing and have an understanding of the need for paragraphs. • Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points would help candidates to gain this mark. • Paragraphs can be denoted by a space between writing or indentation. |
| | Format and structure | <p>Candidates found the format and structure of an article more challenging than a letter. Some candidates did write a letter rather than an article and subsequently lost these two marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An article must have a title and demonstrate a clear structure, for example: a beginning, a middle and an end. • It is important that candidates continue to be made aware of the Format and Structure for a letter, email, article and report for future series. |
| | Language | <p>The use of tone, vocabulary and expression improved slightly this year by 6%, but there are still many non-Standard English expressions used and, to a certain extent, slang and/or colloquialisms that are not acceptable in this assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example: 'dem', 'gonna', 'cause', 'keep' for hold, 'an' for and, 'stuff', and 'etc.' • There were fewer instances of text speak, but an increased use of '&' rather than the written form of 'and'. |
| | Logical sequence | <p>94% of candidates achieved at least one mark and 80% the full two marks which is an excellent result. This appears to be as a result of following the sequence of the bullet points.</p> |
| | Sentence structure | <p>The results for sentence structure were comparable to 2019. Many candidates were successful in using compound sentences. The majority of candidates achieved two marks for constructing complete written sentences most of the time, 25% achieved the full three marks for complete sentences throughout the writing and 17% one mark for complete sentences some of the time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some candidates attempted complex sentences, which are not required at this level. |
| | Spelling | <p>There was a marked improvement in the number of candidates gaining the full three marks from 23% in 2019 to 38% in the October 2020 series. However, there are still too many</p> |

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| | | <p>American spellings being used which are not acceptable in a Standard English assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling in their writing, that will have appeared correctly in the source documents, even if it is above the level, will be penalised. • ‘alot’ and ‘writting’ continue to be constant spelling errors, as did the variations within a single text of the spelling of advantages and disadvantages. • Frequently seen errors in the October 2020 series were: ‘hole’ (whole), ‘now’ (know), ‘advice’ (advise), ‘or’ (are), ‘weather’ (whether), ‘them selves’ (themselves), ‘apart’ (a part) • Additional errors seen more frequently in both the August and October 2020 series were the use of short forms. St (Street), Rd (Road), Av (Avenue), yrs (years), pics (pictures). |
| | Punctuation | <p>Punctuation continues to be challenging for the candidates and it is important that teachers are aware of the punctuation being assessed at this level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of sentence full stops, question or exclamation marks, capital letters at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns, are the requirements for this level. It is important that candidates are aware of this. Other punctuation, used incorrectly, is not penalised at Stage 2. • Many candidates continue to use capital letters inappropriately at the start of a word or in a word, which results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, A, C, F, H, J, K, L, M, O, S, T, P, V and W, although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised. This inappropriate usage can see candidates lose two or three marks before any other punctuation is assessed in the writing. • Many candidates still use the lower case ‘i’ for the pronoun ‘I’, which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text. |
| | Grammar | <p>There was a notable decline in grammar skills with 45% of candidates not achieving any of the three marks. In 2019 there had been an improvement on the previous year. In both August and October 2020 many candidates wrote more than the minimum number of words required and it was observed that the longer the text, the more SPaG errors were made, despite the table of errors allowing more errors for longer texts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common repeat errors included: singular and plural agreement, is/are; tenses; as/has and of, for has/have; life/lives; to/too and the omission of the subject in sentences. Candidates often wrote in commands rather than complete statements. • Candidates also need to be more aware of definite and indefinite articles. |

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| | Proof reading | There was a slight increase in the number of candidates who signed to say they had proof read their writing from 51% in 2019 to 59% in the October 2020 series. Even candidates who had used all of the paper and finished above the line where they should sign, often failed to do so. This is the loss of one mark. |
| Stage 3 Writing | Plan | <p>55% of candidates gained at least one mark for the plan, which is a slight improvement on 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates need to be aware that they address each of the bullet points and do not just copy the bullet points given, into the space allocated for their plan. • The plan needs to reflect the bullet points and can be just one word or a phrase. Some candidates were giving an introduction, a middle and an end for the plan (with nothing alongside this) or dividing the space for the plan into four segments and numbering each one. This does not attract the mark for a plan. • In the August 2020 paper, for example, candidates needed to address the rubric about Social Media: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. what (are the most popular uses of social media) – FaceBook, Instagram, SnapChat etc. 5. why (so many people use social media) – contact with friends and family, meet new people. 6. what (are the advantages and disadvantage) – use any time of day, free/takes up too much time, meet the wrong people <p>This is all that is required from candidates to achieve the mark(s). They do not have to write what, why or what or number the points, but just indicate they have understood what the plan requires and show that it will inform their writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no set format for the plan, but candidates must demonstrate the ability to plan. • Some candidates still use the plan box to write a rough draft. This does not achieve any marks and wastes the time that candidates need to complete their actual writing. |
| | Length 300 words | <p>There was a marked improvement in the number of candidates who wrote a minimum of 300 words, from 25% in 2019 to 47% in the October 2020 series. This improvement was also observed in the sittings of the August 2020 paper, which is possibly a reflection of the candidates who sat the assessment.</p> <p>This is an excellent result, but some candidates continued to write 400+ words which resulted in a loss of control of other criteria and this was reflected in their overall mark for writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts of less than 300 words also have an effect on marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. • A number of candidates wrote more than 300 words, which resulted in many cases of ‘rambling’ and additional errors. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates need to be aware that writing less than 99 words will have a marked effect on their logical sequence, language and SPaG marks. |
| | Content | <p>91% of candidates achieved the full three marks and 5%, two marks. Only 3% of candidates didn't achieve a mark and this was mainly due to writing on a different topic than the rubric.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates often appeared to write from experience, demonstrating a broad and interesting depth of knowledge. They were able to immerse themselves in the topics on both the August 2020 and October 2020 papers. Even the less able candidates were able to draw upon their own experiences and engage with the task. |
| | Legible writing | <p>97% of candidates gained the mark for legibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was an improvement in legibility of handwriting. There were still issues with faint writing, as some candidates had not used blue or black pens. |
| | Paragraphs | <p>86% of candidates gained the mark for the use of paragraphs, which is an improvement on 70% in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an accessible mark if candidates just demonstrate a break in their writing at an appropriate place. At this level it is not assessed if a new paragraph has been used to demonstrate a change in Time, Place, Topic or Person. Organising paragraphs around the three bullet points helps candidates to gain this mark |
| | Format and Structure | <p>Candidates found the format and structure of an article more challenging than a letter. Some candidates did write a letter rather than an article and subsequently lost these two marks. 17% of candidates did not achieve the full two marks as compared with 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An article must have a title and demonstrate a clear structure, for example, a beginning, a middle and an end. It is important that candidates continue to be made aware of the Format and Structure for a letter, email, article and report, for future series. |
| | Language | <p>The use of tone, vocabulary, and expression was consistent across October 2020, August 2020 and the 2019 series. There are still many non-Standard English expressions used and to a certain extent, slang and/or colloquialisms that are not acceptable in this assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example: 'dem'; 'gonna'; 'cause'; 'keep' for hold; 'an' for and; 'stuff'; 'etc.' and 'wonna'. There were fewer instances of text speak, but an increased use of '&' rather than the written form of 'and'. |
| | Clear and coherent | <p>83% of candidates achieved the full three marks, an increase of 2% on 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most candidates wrote clearly with an ability to link their writing throughout. There were instances where the |

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| | | <p>writing lacked clarity due to points / ideas being awkwardly phrased or slightly jumbled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some candidates ramble and lose control of coherence in an attempt to reach 400 words. |
| | Logical sequence | <p>89% of candidates achieved the full three marks, an increase of 6% on 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan can help with sequencing, which most candidates did. Focusing clearly on the bullet points to help sequence writing would potentially produce full marks. There were a small number of candidates that tended to ramble, repeat, or lose focus. This was more apparent with candidates that wrote 300+ words. |
| | Sentence structures | <p>71% of candidates achieved the full three marks, which was an increase from 63% in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most candidates were able to demonstrate their ability to use a full range of sentence types. There was often at least one successful attempt at a complex sentence, even where candidates had numerous grammatical and other errors. On a positive note, there was a large number who used multiple complex sentences in their writing and a range of other sentence forms. The writing style was observed to be more mature than in previous years, but this might be a reflection on the age range of candidates. |
| | Spelling | <p>There was an improvement in candidates receiving the full marks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As mentioned above too many American spellings are being used, which are not acceptable in a Standard English assessment. Candidates should be aware that an incorrect spelling in their writing, that will have appeared correctly in the source documents, even if it is above the level, will be penalised. Some persistent spelling errors included: 'alot', 'oportunity', 'vilent', 'bulling', 'on' (instead of and) 'plat form', 'web site', 'now a days', 'freetime', 'where/were', 'aswell', 'meadia', 'eachother', 'inturn', 'recieve', 'advanges', 'socalil', 'wheather', 'diffrent', 'aslo', 'apart' (a part). Additional errors seen more frequently in both the August 2020 and October 2020 series are the use of short forms. St (Street), Rd (Road), Av (Avenue), yrs (years), pics (pictures). |
| | Punctuation | <p>Punctuation continues to be a challenge, although a few candidates achieved three or four marks more compared to last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> End of sentence punctuation was often missing and there was a lack of commas in lists, rogue apostrophes, and capital letters. Many candidates continue to use capital letters inappropriately, at the start of a word or in a word, which |

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| | | <p>results in them being penalised for improper use of upper case. This is most usually seen with the letters, A, C, F, H, J, K, L, M, O, S, T, P, V and W, although other letters are also incorrectly capitalised. This inappropriate usage can see candidates lose two or three marks before any other punctuation is assessed in the writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many candidates still use the lower case 'i' for the pronoun 'I', which is penalised up to a maximum of four times in the written text. • End of sentence full stops, question or exclamation marks, capital letters at the start of a sentence and for proper nouns, commas and apostrophes, are the requirement for this level. It is important that candidates are aware of this. Other punctuation, used incorrectly, for example, colons, semi-colons and hyphens are not penalised at this level. |
| | Grammar | <p>Grammar skills have shown no improvement. Some of the same issues occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject verb agreement, inconsistent use of tenses, both singular and plural, for example, have, has and had, and the incorrect use of 'a' and 'an'. • Candidates need to have control of the use of 's' at the end of words as well as other tenses. Many candidates wrote excellent texts but achieved fewer marks due their control or knowledge of punctuation and grammar in particular. • Candidates need to be more aware of definite and indefinite articles. |
| | Proof reading | <p>74% of candidates signed to indicate they had proof read their work as compared to 65% in 2019. There were still a number of candidates who had reached the line where they should sign and hadn't done so. This is an accessible mark.</p> |

Section 4 Areas of good performance

Candidates who achieved a merit or distinction demonstrated:

- an understanding of the main purpose of a text and at Stage 2 and 3 identified at least two main points
- that they were able to gain the maximum or nearly the maximum number of marks in the reading section
- the skill to read the questions carefully
- the ability to relate an image to print and gain understanding
- skills to find an appropriate dictionary definition and synonyms
- knowledge of grammar and punctuation in the Reading section
- the skill to write at the requisite length with good sentence structure, in a logical sequence whilst being clear and coherent and covering all content points
- the skill to write out a plan to inform writing
- SPaG skills and the ability to gain near to maximum marks in the Writing section
- that they were able to structure their piece of writing to achieve nearly maximum marks
- the use of Standard English

Section 5 Areas for development

- candidates to be aware of the punctuation being assessed for their level
- a greater command of grammar in both the Reading and Writing sections of the paper
- encouragement of the use of dictionaries when required
- the type of organisational features that could appear on a paper and the correct way to answer the question
- careful reading of questions in the Reading section to locate specific information
- encourage candidates to plan their writing in the appropriate format to enable the plan to inform the writing
- working with candidates on the appropriate use of capital letters in the Writing section
- knowledge of format and structure for different formats
- proof reading of documents for Stage 2 and 3
- advising candidates that writing a draft or a rough copy of their text takes up time and is not a requirement for this qualification.

Section 6 Recommendations and advice for centres

- ensure candidates have a 'hard' blue or black pen to ensure legibility of their script
- ensure there is access to a dictionary for all candidates so that they are not disadvantaged and that candidates are aware of the definition required eg, noun, adjective etc. where appropriate
- give candidates the opportunity to do at least one sample paper to explore queries on question formation and what the assessment is looking to achieve
- remind candidates they are not required, for most questions, to write out complete sentences or paragraphs or repeat the question stem in the answer
- remind candidates to look at the number of marks per question so that they can achieve maximum marks by giving the requisite number of answers
- be aware of the criteria for the stage so that candidates are not trying to work above the level, particularly with punctuation
- advise candidates to finish their writing when they have achieved the minimum word length if they have no further substantive information to impart