

2012 HSC Notes from the Marking Centre – English (ESL)

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Introduction

This document has been produced for the teachers and candidates of the Stage 6 course in English (ESL). It contains comments on candidate responses to the 2012 Higher School Certificate examination, indicating the quality of the responses and highlighting their relative strengths and weaknesses.

This document should be read along with the relevant syllabus, the 2012 Higher School Certificate examination, the marking guidelines and other support documents developed by the Board of Studies to assist in the teaching and learning of English (ESL).

General comments

Teachers and candidates should be aware that examiners may ask questions that address the syllabus outcomes in a manner that requires candidates to respond by integrating their knowledge, understanding and skills developed through studying the course.

Candidates need to be aware that the marks allocated to the question and the answer space (where this is provided on the examination paper) are guides to the length of the required response. A longer response will not in itself lead to higher marks. Writing far beyond the indicated space may reduce the time available for answering other questions.

Candidates need to be familiar with the Board's [Glossary of Key Words](#), which contains some terms commonly used in examination questions. However, candidates should also be aware that not all questions will start with or contain one of the key words from the glossary. Questions such as 'how?', 'why?' or 'to what extent?' may be asked, or verbs that are not included in the glossary may be used, such as 'design', 'translate' or 'list'.

Paper 1 – Language Study within an Area of Study

Section I

Question 1

General comments

In better responses, candidates drew clear connections between the concept of belonging and the language and visual features used to present ideas and information in the stimulus texts. They interpreted the requirements of the questions accurately and responded both appropriately and concisely, taking into account the marks awarded for each question.

In weaker responses, candidates made limited connections between belonging and forms and features of the texts. A small number of candidates included unnecessary details or copied parts of the texts in their responses.

Specific comments

- (a) In better responses, candidates correctly explained why the composer challenged herself to eat alone, using one or more of the reasons given in the text.

In weaker responses, candidates copied parts of the text or identified a reason without giving further explanation.

- (b) In better responses, candidates effectively identified Sarah's feelings about belonging and clearly indicated how language forms and features are used to communicate these feelings.

In weaker responses candidates identified the composer's feeling or attitude with little or no analysis of the text.

- (c) In better responses, candidates effectively identified ideas about relationships represented in the cartoon and used detailed examples of visual language features. Interpretation and analysis were closely linked to present a well-reasoned response to the cartoon.

In weaker responses, candidates identified an idea about relationships or described an aspect or aspects of the scene depicted in the cartoon. These responses were generalised or made limited reference to features of the text.

- (d) In the better responses, candidates clearly explained the statement, making inferences from the whole text.

In weaker responses, candidates explained the statement in a limited or literal manner.

- (e) In better responses, candidates clearly and effectively explained how conflicting ideas about belonging were presented in the text and provided detailed textual references to support their response.

In weaker responses, candidates identified conflicting ideas about belonging with limited reference to the text.

- (f) In better responses, candidates correctly identified a common aspect of belonging and effectively explained the ways in which it is explored in each of the texts.

In weaker responses, candidates identified an aspect of belonging and provided limited textual references.

- (g) In better responses, candidates used ideas from at least one of the texts and produced an effective personal reflection for a blog that communicated ideas about belonging in

today's world. These responses sustained the register of a blog by using a clear personal voice.

In weaker responses candidates relied heavily on information from the texts and did not clearly communicate ideas about belonging in today's world. Many of these candidates provided an analysis of one or more of the stimulus texts or large parts from the texts were copied.

Section II

Question 2

In most responses, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the concept of belonging and the link between identity and an individual's sense of belonging and/or not belonging as represented in their texts. Overall, many candidates also showed good skills in interpreting texts and synthesising ideas. In most responses, candidates attempted the appropriate form and structure of an essay.

In better responses, candidates introduced a thesis in response to the question which they maintained and developed throughout the essay. These candidates made effective comparisons between their texts and presented a highly developed and coherent discussion. They provided detailed and insightful explanations of how different texts convey the idea that a sense of belonging and/or not belonging shapes a person's identity, demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of the texts and an insightful understanding of the idea and related concepts. Evaluation and/or comparison of the extent to which the idea is reflected in each text was also evident. Language forms and features were analysed effectively and in detail and brief quotations were used to enhance discussion of characters, relationships, situations, events, notions, issues and/or themes represented in the texts. In better responses, candidates also demonstrated a high degree of fluency and sustained control of expression.

A number of candidates discussed belonging in general terms rather than specifically discussing how belonging or not belonging was conveyed in or through the texts studied. Others narrowed their discussion to address the question partially, concentrating more on the ideas of belonging and/or not belonging conveyed in their texts but not clearly linking this to the notion of shaping identity. A number of responses appeared to have been prepared beforehand and addressed elements of questions from previous years' examinations.

Not all responses examined the prescribed texts in detail; hence the discussion of identity was at times limited. Some candidates appeared to select a few key extracts from the texts rather than offer in-depth discussion of the whole text. Most candidates looked at the idea of identity in terms of the characters portrayed in the text, while others focused on their own sense of identity shaped by a sense of belonging and/or not belonging. Not all responses addressed the idea of 'identity' but used terms like 'self', 'place in the world', 'confidence' or 'security' instead. Some examined the notion in a superficial way by including the phrases 'belonging/not belonging' and 'identity' in the introduction, at the end of the discussion of each text, and in the conclusion. In many cases, only brief attention was given to comparing the extent to which the texts supported the idea that belonging and/or not belonging shapes a sense of identity. At times this causal component of the responses was implied rather than explained, or else the link was reversed; often the evidence to substantiate claims was lacking.

Most candidates interpreted the texts well, demonstrating understanding of the concept and the ways that characters acquire a sense of personal identity through their experiences of belonging and/or not belonging. Some had difficulty explaining how an individual's sense of belonging or identity was communicated in the text. Most identified some of the techniques evident in the texts but many did not use these selectively to support the argument they were presenting in their response. In weaker responses, candidates retold or described the content of the texts rather than interpreting and analysing the techniques used by the composers to convey ideas.

Candidates should address all the terms of the question, and select examples carefully and integrate them into the discussion to support their thesis. Where poetry has been selected as a prescribed text, it is advisable to refer to more than one of the set poems in the response and to confirm that the poems they use in their discussion are actually on the list of prescribed texts for that composer.

Candidates should also consider the relevance and appropriateness of related texts in linking them to the other texts and the thesis of their response.

Paper 2 – Modules

Section I – Module A: Experience Through Language

General comments

In better responses, candidates integrated their analysis and discussion of ideas into their overall response to the task. In weaker responses, candidates often provided a general description of techniques and did not relate this back to the task.

Candidates who relied heavily on prepared responses did not address the specific requirements and focus of the task. Reference to a related text was not required.

Specific comments

Question 1 – Elective 1: Australian Voices

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the elective and the prescribed text. They developed a clear thesis and provided detailed discussion of how the text reflects the idea of ‘Many voices, one country’. They made insightful distinctions between textual forms and language features, and referred to specific examples to illustrate how a range of voices had been created in the text to reflect the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and groups within Australian society. These responses adopted the interview form in innovative and engaging ways and sustained a strong sense of the speaker’s personal voice and a formal register throughout.

In many responses, candidates discussed how the composer or editor presents a range of voices and only superficially addressed how these voices reflect the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and groups within Australian society. Some candidates relied heavily on examples of the use of slang, idioms and accent in the text to illustrate their conception of an Australian voice or voices. In more limited responses, candidates merely provided a recount of the text, either in full or in part, or provided character profiles or catalogues of techniques with little or no reference to the task.

(a) Prose Fiction – J C Burke, *The Story of Tom Brennan*

Many candidates focused on the characters’ voices and how these voices changed throughout the narrative instead of analysing narrative structure and features of language.

In better responses, candidates analysed how the composer has presented a distinctly Australian voice through the narrative and how this voice reflects the values, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and groups within Australian society, with particular reference to life in rural Australia.

In weaker responses, candidates relied heavily on retelling the plot with limited analysis of language features and little or no reference to the elective focus.

(b) Drama – Katherine Thomson, *Diving for Pearls*

In better responses, candidates effectively addressed the use of dramatic forms and features to create a range of voices that reflect the different modes of expression and changing values and attitudes of both the characters and Australian society itself.

In weaker responses, candidates tended to be superficial, lacking in specific examples and analysis and often gave a simple recount of plot details.

(c) Poetry – Komninos, *Komninos by the Kupful*

In better responses, candidates analysed and discussed the use of poetic forms and features and the creation of a persona's voice and/or characters' voices in the poems. They explored the articulation of Australian attitudes and lifestyles in the poems and contrasted a range of attitudes and values presented.

In weaker responses, candidates were often limited to descriptions of register and accent.

(d) Nonfiction – Carmel Bird (ed), *The Stolen Children – Their Stories*

Most candidates considered the text as a whole, focusing specifically on the political and editorial responses to the stories and comparing these discourses to the voices of the Indigenous stolen children themselves.

In better responses, candidates developed a thesis, discussing in detail how the text explored different ideas about Australia. These candidates compared and contrasted the different types of Australian voices presented by the editor, focusing on the issues of assimilation and egalitarianism.

In weaker responses, candidates presented recounts of some of the stories told by the stolen children.

(e) Film – Rob Sitch, *The Castle*

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a thorough understanding of the film as a whole and developed a thesis, focusing on how the characters' voices and the interplay of those voices reflect the values, attitudes and perceptions of a multicultural Australian society.

In weaker responses, candidates relied heavily on plot recount, simple discussion of characters and relationships, and examples of dialogue, with little or no analysis of the features of film.

Question 2 – Elective 2: Australian Visions

General comments

In better responses, candidates demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the elective and the prescribed text. They developed a clear thesis and provided detailed discussion of how the text reflects the idea of 'Many visions, one country'. They made insightful distinctions between textual forms and language features, and referred to specific and relevant examples to illustrate how a range of visions had been created in the text to reflect the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of individuals and groups within Australian society. These responses adopted the interview form in innovative and engaging ways and provided a strong evocation of the speaker's personal vision.

In many responses, candidates discussed how the composer created a range of visions but only superficially addressed the relationships between images and descriptions presented in the text and the attitudes, values or perceptions embodied or evoked by those elements. In some responses, candidates discussed examples of images in the text without referring to how they can communicate a vision. In weaker responses, candidates referred to only a small portion of the prescribed text, relied on retelling the story or describing characters and settings, and provided little or no discussion of textual forms and language features.

(a) Prose Fiction – Peter Goldsworthy, *Maestro*

Candidates tended to focus on different perceptions of life in Darwin and different attitudes to music. In better responses, candidates developed an analysis of how narrative structure and techniques were used to create Australian visions and linked these visions to ideas about Australia.

In weaker responses, candidates focused on the relationship between Paul and Keller or provided simple plot recounts and incidental descriptions of characters and settings.

(b) Drama – John Misto, *The Shoe-Horn Sonata*

In better responses, candidates provided detailed analysis of the integrated use of dramatic and audio-visual techniques to discuss the Australian vision of mateship and restitution of past injustices presented in the play. These candidates explained the ways in which Misto combines theatrical elements such as the projected images, songs, music, sound effects, voice-overs, and the characters' monologues and dialogue to represent settings, personalities, relationships and events.

In most responses, candidates provided an overview of the relationship between Bridie and Sheila and recounted the characters' experiences as prisoners-of-war.

In weaker responses, candidates often relied on simple plot recount.

(c) Poetry – Douglas Stewart, *Selected Poems*

In better responses, candidates demonstrated an insightful understanding of how, through his poetic visions of Australia, Stewart also communicates Australian visions of egalitarianism, an appreciation of Australian flora and fauna, and respect for Indigenous rights. These candidates showed an awareness of the poet's social and historical context and often projected the visions revealed in the poems onto contemporary Australian society.

Most candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of poetic techniques through their analysis of at least two poems.

In weaker responses, candidates relied on recounts of poems' subject matter or the listing of techniques.

(d) Film – Baz Luhrmann, *Strictly Ballroom*

In better responses, candidates integrated an insightful and detailed analysis of film techniques, including music, setting and costuming, into a discussion that focused on Luhrmann's visions of individuality, conformity, competitiveness, persistence and multiculturalism.

Many candidates focused on camera angles and camera shots and made generalised comments on their effect in communicating visual representations of Australian characters, places and situations.

In weaker responses, candidates recalled isolated scenes and relied on superficial analysis of character and dialogue.

(e) Media – Deb Cox, *Seachange*

In better responses, candidates demonstrated an awareness of the features of the text as a television series. These candidates displayed an understanding of the development of Australian visions throughout the episodes chosen and made specific reference to at least two episodes. They contrasted the differing visions presented in the text by different characters.

In weaker responses, candidates relied on a generalised recount of the series as a whole with little or no analysis of film techniques.

Section II – Module B: Texts and Society

Specific comments

Question 3 – Elective 1: Living and Working in the Community

Many candidates displayed a well-developed sense of audience and purpose, and effectively manipulated the language forms and features of an email. In these responses, candidates imaginatively adopted the voice and perspective of a persona and provided recommendations for how the library could improve their services to encourage people to read. They were persuasive, selective in their suggestions and expressed knowledge and insightful understanding of the broader role of a library in encouraging people in the community to read.

In better responses, candidates presented their ideas in a persuasive style which was suited to the audience and specifically addressed the link between services and reading. In these responses, candidates provided meaningful, relevant and detailed support for their perspective. They also showed creative flair in the presentation of their ideas and suggestions through the use of relevant examples and explanations. Sophisticated expression was evident in the presentation of ideas. There was a highly developed sense of context, purpose and audience which was sustained in the language register and form.

Candidates who wrote mid-range responses were usually more general in their presentation and lacked detail, interpretation and creativity. They gave more generalised opinions which were tied closely to the library and while these candidates attempted to justify their suggestions, they did not recognise the significance of improving services to promote reading in the community.

In weaker responses, candidates focused on the library and/or did not respond to the question. They did not present valid suggestions and were unable to present their ideas appropriately for an audience. These candidates incorporated minimal supporting detail, although many attempted to list points in a general way. They also displayed a lack of control of expression.

Question 4 – Elective 2: Academic English

Candidates generally reflected an awareness of the specified form, but varied in terms of addressing the specific purpose and audience of the task, and in their control of language register.

Most candidates composed an entry for a webpage about study skills. In weaker responses, candidates provided limited or no evaluation of the effectiveness of the study skills described or did not fully address the reflective component of the task. These responses often lacked synthesis.

In better responses, candidates presented their information in a personal and insightful manner and specifically addressed what they had learned about effective study skills and how this had benefited their learning. In these responses, candidates provided meaningful, relevant and detailed support for their opinions. They also showed creative flair in the presentation of their ideas and advice through the use of relevant examples and explanations. Sophisticated expression was evident in the presentation of ideas. There was a highly developed sense of context, purpose and audience which was sustained in the language register and form.

Candidates who wrote mid-range responses, were usually more general in their presentation of advice and lacked detail, interpretation and reflection. They provided more generalised information and although these candidates attempted to justify their advice, they did not recognise the significance of the recommendations they were making.

In weaker responses, candidates did not respond to the question. They did not present advice and were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of study skills. In these responses, candidates displayed little awareness of the target audience and tended to list generic information rather than attempting to explain study skills strategies. They also displayed a lack of control of expression.

Listening Paper

Specific comments

Question 1

Most candidates correctly identified reasons why Marguerite was inspired to become a bush pilot. In better responses, candidates clearly identified two different reasons.

Question 2

Most candidates provided a description of what Marguerite was talking about when ‘the unusual happened’. In better responses, candidates provided a detailed description.

Question 3

In better responses, candidates provided a detailed explanation of why Mara felt she was living ‘in an alien planet’ when she first moved to Mt Gambier. In these responses, candidates included a comparison with Mara’s life in Argentina and demonstrated a clear understanding of the phrase ‘in an alien planet’.

Candidates who wrote mid-range responses included descriptions of Mt Gambier quoted from the stimulus text and either a comparison with Argentina or an explanation of the phrase ‘in an alien planet’.

In weaker responses, candidates quoted descriptions of Mt Gambier from the stimulus without explanation.

Question 4

Most candidates provided a reason why Mara describes school as ‘a nightmare’.

Question 5

In better responses, candidates provided an effective and detailed description of the ways in which Marguerite’s and Mara’s lives are similar to and different from each other.

In mid-range responses, candidates provided some detail of similarities and/or differences.

In weaker responses, candidates identified a similarity and/or difference in a limited way.

Question 6

In better responses, candidates provided a highly effective analysis of how language features and production techniques contribute to the presentation of each of the stories. In these responses, candidates provided specific and detailed examples from the stimulus text.

In mid-range responses, candidates provided a sound analysis of how each story is presented with reference to examples from the stimulus text.

In weaker responses, candidates attempted to explain how each story is presented with limited reference to the stimulus text. Some candidates provided generic definitions of language features and production techniques without any reference to the stimulus.