2000 HSC Notes from the Examination Centre English

English

2 Unit General

Paper 1 – Uses of English and Topic Areas

Section I – Reading Task (20 marks)

Generally candidates were prepared for the style of the paper and the type of questions to be asked. Candidates need to be aware of the allocation as a guide to the length and complexity of the response required.

Question 1(a) (2 marks)
The question appeared straightforward but many candidates did not acknowledge that there was a change in the writer's response to finding the seal and identified only a single response, often supported with either an explanation or quote. Better responses identified both responses and supported with evidence.

Question 1(b) (6 marks)
Almost all candidates were able to identify the writer's responses to the seal. Most candidates supported their statements with quotations and were able to identify the literary device involved. The better responses showed clearly the link between the language and the response, commenting on the purpose and effect of the language.

Question 1(c) (4 marks)
Most candidates responded by identifying 2 or more relevant language types giving an example of each. Better responses were able to identify a difference in the level of formality used in different sections of the passage.

Question 1(d) (8 marks)
While some candidates handled the question well, many responses were far too general, lacking support and insight. Many candidates felt obliged to cover all the suggested language features often producing comments about structure and intended audience, which were generic and/or repetitive. Candidates had trouble discussing the effects of the use of various language techniques. Better responses went beyond simply listing techniques. The skills of compare and contrast may need to be reinforced with candidates.

Section II – Common Writing Task (20 marks)

The 2000 Common Writing task required candidates to adopt the persona of a character in the stimulus photograph and reflect on the significance of the photograph in the form of a journal entry.

The question was an effective discriminator as the more able candidates were able to reflect, using an engaging and credible voice, with an awareness of past and present. The weaker responses showed an over-reliance on narrative and recount, often with inconsistent tense and voice. The narrative element of the weaker responses was evident in the many pedestrian "Titanic" and "WW2 refugee" type responses.

The Candidates

The photo offered a wide range of possible student responses. Candidates were sensitive to the circumstances shown in the photo, however, some aimed for originality at the expense of relevance to the photo.

The most popular approach tended to be a migrant reflecting on the emotional experience of leaving home; however the question did allow for some unique responses. Only a small range of candidates attempted satire or parody.

Better responses engaged the reader through a strong controlled voice, a clear well-structured development and a highly competent use of language.

The candidates who were unable to create and sustain a reflective voice resorted to narrative. Many slipped into conversation thus losing the perspective of reflection. The weaker responses had difficulty shifting between the past and present and demonstrated poor understanding of the term "reflection".

Being a journal entry enabled candidates to respond in a wide variety of forms, which perhaps generated large blocks of writing at the expense of paragraphing.

Section III – Topic Areas

Discovery

The best responses did more than identify "threats" and "rewards". They focused on the balance between threats and rewards inferred by the question. The best responses made considered, analytical judgements about the threats and rewards in the material with which they were familiar (that is, both their Core Text and their chosen Supplementary Material). The better candidates were able to select two or more pieces of Supplementary Material which dealt with similar issues as the text and were able to analytically discuss their relevance to the text through repeated cross-referencing, synthesising the two pieces of information and drawing logical conclusions.

The simple language of the question did, however, allow weaker candidates to use a "prepared" response approach. These responses were generally notable for their inability to structure an argument which kept them in the average to below average range. Weaker responses also had a tendency to ignore any linkage between the Core Text and the Supplementary Material or, alternatively, to ignore the instructiuon to use a variety of Supplementary Material. Weaker candidates failed to understand that Supplementary Material needs to be selected on the basis that it supports their understanding of the Core Text and further enhances their written response to a particular question which has certain focuses that need to be addressed.

As in previous years, the most popular text by far was *Looking for Alibrandi* with *My Place* also studied by many candidates. The one text barely represented was *The Fiftieth Gate*. Some candidates used the film version of *Looking for Alibrandi* as Supplementary Material; however, only a few were able to use the changes to the story to support an above average response.

Satire

Better responses addressed the purpose of satire, making judgements about the balance between humour and criticism in the Core Texts and Supplementary Material studied.

This question was approached in two common forms: via a textual analysis or a stylistic deconstruction. The better responses generally favoured the former and when discussing specific incidents, integrated appropriately chosen Supplementary Material to enhance the argument. The more able candidates also balanced their responses by discussing both "to educate" and "to entertain" in proportion. The best responses integrated knowledge of techniques, recognising that they were often the source of entertainment in satire.

The below average responses were generally lacking in the area of how satire "entertains"; all were able to provide a textbook definition but were unable to clarify it any further. Some candidates also found selecting relevant and appropriate examples of Supplementary Material too challenging. They often appeared to have rote learnt two pieces of Supplementary Material only and were determined to use them despite the question. Some struggled to use one piece of Supplementary Material and focussed on retelling the story from the Core Text. There were very few candidates with no Supplementary Material.

The most popular texts for Satire were *Frontline* and *Animal Farm*. There were very few responses on *Gulliver's Travels*.

General Comments
Both Topic Areas were fairly equally represented at this year's exam. The question of sourcing Supplementary Material was not a major issue as candidates knew the minimum requirements for this, namely, to ensure that their Supplementary Material was sufficiently sourced to convey a sense of authenticity for the markers. There was a wide range of Supplementary Material drawn from many kinds of text.

Paper 2 – Responses to Literature

Section II – Unique Poetry/Fiction/Drama

Part A – Poetry

All the questions directed the candidates to examine two aspects that were fundamental to the intent of the poems. In doing this, the candidates were expected to analyse the use of poetic techniques.
The A range scripts showed sustained development of ideas with more than ample support and had a strong and consistent focus on the question. The use of language demonstrated flair.

The B range scripts also showed a strong focus on the question. There was generally a solid understanding of issues supported with relevant quotation. Use of language demonstrated above average skill and the presentation of ideas was clear and logical.

The C range scripts showed a reasonable understanding of the poems but lacked depth of insight. They would often rely on retell and make reference to poetic devices with little understanding of their effect. Expression was generally sound but was occasionally characterised by spelling errors and/or weak grammar.

The D and E range scripts demonstrated limited understanding of the question and frequent misreading of the poems. For the D range there tended to be a reliance on story telling with unsupported generalisations. Both D and E range responses did not address technique in any meaningful way.

Part B – Fiction

The "What do you think?", in four of the eight questions enabled some candidates to interpret the question to suit themselves and justified a variety of responses. Markers found the range for all texts.

Most candidates' responses demonstrated an understanding of the question and a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the text studied. Most candidates could use the conventions of the essay and write a sustained argument. There was good use of quotes from the text to support argument. Weaker responses established a premise, but the line of argument relied on retelling the story and the use of quotes was inappropriate.

Part C – Drama

The questions in this section were straightforward and allowed candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the texts and their dramatic qualities.

Once again candidates' writing skills seem to have developed in terms of structured, detailed responses, with the average scripts exceeding four pages. Even among those candidates who had difficulty focusing on the question, there were many who were able to write at length on the texts they had studied. Less storytelling was apparent this year.

Across the range of texts, better candidates, were able to see them as plays and to demonstrate a sense of audience and stagecraft while addressing all aspects of the question.

There was some evidence of prepared answers. An increasing number of candidates appeared to be answering a question from a previous year. Obviously candidates have been practising from past papers, but need to be able to adapt their knowledge to a range of questions. Often, candidates who were unable to deal with a question resorted to a prepared thematic approach that disregarded the question.

2/3 Unit (Common)

Paper 1 – Resources and Uses of English and Shakespeare

Section I

Question 1 – Reading Task (15 marks)

The 2000 Reading question included a multi-layered passage with a very rich demonstration of language techniques. This was a suitably challenging passage for 2/3 Unit candidates, allowing the stronger candidates to explore the variety of voices and language techniques employed by the writer. The passage was an edited version of a passage derived from *Owls Do Cry* by Janet Frame.

The question, "Analyse the writer's use of language in portraying Francie's thoughts and feelings evoked by her last day of school" was certainly a discriminating question, as it required candidates to distinguish the different voices employed in the passage, as well as apply their knowledge of language to a complex passage through a multi-faceted question.

Considering the time frame required for this question, markers were very impressed in 2000 with the quality and depth of candidates' responses. The level of literacy was extremely high, and the commitment shown by candidates to this complex passage and multi-faceted question was most impressive. Better responses showed an insight into the integrated and complex portrayal of character being presented by the writer through her use of language, while all candidates were able to explore aspects of the character's thoughts and feelings as presented through this complex passage. Weaker responses either presented a 'walk through' of the passage, highlighting some features of language with varying degrees of relevance and insight, or employed a standardised rubric of formulaic approach in identifying and discussing particular language techniques, without any holistic appreciation of character portrayal and language use.

Question 2 – Writing Task

See page 2.
The Writing Task is common to both the 2/3 Unit and 2 Unit General Papers.

Section II – Shakespeare

Question 3 – Othello (25 marks)

In general, the standard of textual knowledge and the understanding of the play's issues were very sound. Quotation was accurate and integrated and expression of ideas was sound.

The term 'loyalty' confused some candidates who were unable to clearly define the concept and often conflated it with themes such as trust and honesty. Better responses analysed loyalty as a motif/theme that threaded its way across other themes and relationships in the text. They also examined the ways Shakespeare presented 'loyalty' and made comment on his purpose in doing so.

Paper 2 – Poetry/Fiction/Drama

Section II – Unique Poetry/Fiction/Drama

Poetry

Better candidates were able to choose the most appropriate poems to suit the question. They dealt with all aspects of the question, developed a consistent line of argument, were prepared to argue a case that might challenge the question, and integrated appropriate quotations to reveal a thorough knowledge of the poetry.

Average candidates knew the poems and attempted to engage with the question. Some had problems with the terms of some questions, such as "morality" in Browning, "passion" in Donne and "civilised" and "primitive" in Heaney.

Weaker candidates often did little more than paraphrase the poetry, apparently believing a linkage of quotations was sufficient.

Fiction

Many responses were articulate and focussed, showing detailed knowledge of the text both in quotes as well as reference to events, character relationships and narrative style. There were many lengthy, sustained responses. Several had a fresh approach and were enjoyable to read. Some had a sophisticated approach to reading questions and analysis.

Weaker responses tended to list examples and failed to engage with all aspects of the question. There was a tendency to story-tell, and frequently these responses had a narrow and very simple argument.

Drama

The majority of 2/3 Unit (Common) candidates showed a good knowledge of their texts and an ability to write literate responses. Most candidates attempted to answer the question and were well prepared in their use of textual evidence.

The better candidates focussed on both the questions and the dramatic elements of the texts. They used integrated quotations appropriately, and were fluent, original and refined.

The average candidates still attempted to answer the question but did not necessarily focus on the whole question nor deal with the dramatic features of the text. They sometimes tried to adapt a prepared response to the question without due reference to the particular requirements of the examination question.

Weaker candidates tended to focus on plot and character without engaging with the question or the text. These responses were sometimes brief and poorly expressed.

Better candidates generally tended to write about more complex texts like *Arcadia* and *Six Degrees of Separation*. The majority of candidates chose *Cosi* and while there were some outstanding scripts, many did not come to terms with the part of the question, "the production of *Cosi…*" and relied on obvious quotations and character listing.

More than usual, numbers of students employed literary terminology, which they neither understood nor used appropriately. It often impeded the clear communication of the candidate's own ideas.

The questions were generally accessible and allowed candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of the texts. Some questions implicitly directed the candidates to focus on the dramatic aspects of the plays (Questions 18, 20, 21, 23, 25), while others only implied that they should do so. With the latter, some candidates overlooked the need to discuss dramatic techniques, focussing instead on thematic or literary qualities. These candidates were unable to access the top range of marks.

3 Unit (Additional)

In 2000 1504 students sat for the 3 Unit English Examination.   They attempted two questions, one for each elective. The examination was two hours in length.

Marking Scheme

The Marking Scheme is based on the Syllabus Objectives, as listed in the Board of Studies 3 Unit Syllabus and a list of assessable outcomes derived from these objectives.

Grade A   (25-22)
* constructs coherent and logical argument
* addresses the question
* individual interpretation and analysis
* close reference to text to support argument
* clear and/or sophisticated writing style
* detailed knowledge of text.

Grade B   (21-18)
* constructs argument
* answer is relevant to the question
* attempts an individual response
* some reference to text and/or language to support argument
* clear writing style
* good knowledge of text

Grade C   (17-13)
* some cohesion in the argument
* answer not always relevant to question
* simplistic and/or standardised interpretation, tendency towards repetition
* reliance on quotations with limited analysis of text and/or language
* simple but basically clear writing style, some non-standard forms
* reasonable knowledge of text.

Grade D   (12-7)
* augmentation of argument scanty and unsustained
* answer not obviously relevant to question
* inadequate interpretation
* use of quotations or references to text with no analysis or explanation
* simple writing style, use of non-standard forms
* limited knowledge of text.

Grade E   (6-0)
* something has gone wrong!
* candidate has run out of time, writes only a few words or lines
* candidate has become ill (May be indicated by Examination Supervisor)
* non-native speaker of English with extremely poor literacy skills
* stress leads to 'non-serious' answer - refer to Senior Marker or Supervisor of Marking
* no attempt to answer the question relevantly.

Not Attempted (NA)
* Completely blank booklet, or words equivalent to 'Not attempted'
* A entered on the mark sheet - **this is different from a mark of 0.**

General Comments

Levels of literacy were generally very good. There was a great competence in the knowledge and understanding of the texts and a general strength in all responses. There was a tendency to longer responses this year but these were not always better responses because they were longer. Some could have been strengthened by being more succinct.

Question 1:   Shakespearean Comedy

The question was set up in the form of a binary opposition; 'end happily' and 'cruelty and sorrow' so candidates quite competently discussed the happy occurrences and the cruel and sorrowful occurrences. The better responses addressed the 'examine' at the beginning of the question and a variety of approaches were used covering an analytical approach to the nature of Comedy, the consideration of the purpose of Comedy, the nature of the relationships in the plays and the darker aspects of the Comedies. There were some interesting responses that related the impact of the play to audience responses in order to support their judgments about the question.

Poorer responses tended to equate a play that ends happily with 'Comedy '. Better responses understood the nature of Comedy and used it as a tool for analysis of the text and the basis of their examination essay. Less successful scripts also focused mainly on the ending of the plays and did not bother to analyse with a broader perspective; they were not able to see the plays as layered. There was a tendency, at this weaker level, to deal narratively with the plays, one by one. Few were able to deal with such issues as cruelty and sorrow as individual concepts. These candidates quoted long passages of text, in preference to shorter and more pointed words or phrases.

Better candidates looked at the convention of the pastoral as a possible layer of meaning in *As You Like It.* These scripts were more analytical and referred to the plays in fresh and personal ways. Very good scripts distinguished between cruelty and sorrow; and displayed a knowledge of the convention of Shakespeare comedy. They selected accurate quotations which shed light on their argument. As well, they showed a high degree of fluency.
An A grade script needed to show a personal response tempered by insight and controlled by the text.

Most candidates answered on *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It.* Some candidates wrote on all three texts and this weakened their response, as responses on each text were more superficial.

Question 2:   Contemporary Australian Drama

There was a tendency for students to produce issues based responses. The concept of "Australianness" was not well addressed and candidates struggled to come to terms with the implications of this narrow focus.

Texts were often not discussed or viewed as plays. There was a distinct lack of appreciation of the theatricality of this medium. Candidates who were able to integrate an analysis of issues with the way performance communicated these issues were rewarded with above average marks.

Question 3:   Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales

Good responses competently distinguished the various voices of the texts and could effectively discuss judgement in relation to the voices. Better responses were clear in their distinction between Chaucer the poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim.

The poorer responses often skipped one of the parts of the text to be discussed (generally the Prologue to the Tale) and had some trouble with 'judgemental', interpreting it as the ability to make clever judgements about others. The question allowed candidates, indeed encouraged them, to write a personal response, well based in the text.

Question 4:   Yeats: The Later Poems

Many candidates simplified this question into a contrast between imagination and experience. 'Lived experience' was often interpreted as what had happened in Yeats' life, but pleasingly not many candidates fell into the trap of irrelevant biographical details. Better responses interpreted it in an imaginative way. The 'wild' of the experience was often ignored or inserted regularly. The question's challenge lies in the word 'wedded', which required candidates to relate the two elements. Better responses came to terms with the relationship between the 'wild imagination' and 'lived experience' by developing an argument relating to how these elements were linked.

Some of the set poems were more appropriate to answering this question, for example, *'The Circus Animal's Desertion'*, and this was used well by a number of candidates. Often the use of this poem set the rest of the response up well. Other candidates, however, used the poems that they had obviously decided to use despite the question. This did not preclude a good response, but the task weaker students set themselves, was then more difficult.

Strong responses reflected careful selection of poems, to fit the specific requirements of the question. They looked at all three main features of the questions and directly linked them to the poems. Strong responses were also characterised by enthusiasm for the poetry and a clear personal view, and recognised the power of the poetry to illuminate particular features of the human condition.

Conversely, weaker responses had a mechanical feel, which suggested the prepared answer, and discussed the poetry from a remote impersonal viewpoint. They often discussed, at irrelevant length, Yeats' relationship with Maud Gonne and his theory of gyres. They also tended to look at the three poems in succession, rather than discussing the essential features of the poems together, in an integrated response.

In terms of expressive skills, markers were generally impressed with candidates' control of language. However, they did note a number of very long responses that could have been condensed into briefer, more economical and readable essays. Length in itself is not a virtue; it must be justified by cogent argument, and constant relevance to the question. Markers also noted the tendency to quote large sections of poetry as prose and to present quotations, without supporting analysis and discussion. Candidates sometimes overlooked basic writing features such as paragraphing and correct attribution of text titles. However, markers commented that there were few very poor responses. This year, candidates had, on the whole been well prepared, and submitted able responses.

Question 5:   The Study of the Sonnet

Better responses could place 'Shakespearean sonnets' in the context of the sonnet development and competently discussed the 'unconventional' in terms of the imagery subverting the ideas, the rhythms subverting the ideas. Other responses also handled the question well, interpreting 'conventional and unconventional ' in relation to the sonnet sequence.

Poorer responses tended to generalise about 'conventional' and 'unconventional' and then give a reading of 4 sonnets.

The well known of the sonnets were very popular choices.

Question 6:   Utopias and Anti-Utopias

Those candidates who based their discussion on the notion of "societies" were able, in general, to construct relevant and interesting discussions. Candidates who wrote character-based essays examining the experiences of individuals had more difficulty in maintaining a clear focus on the question.

Some students did not express a clear understanding of "paralysis". They either gave a token recognition to the word, or used words such "oppression" as substitutes. Better candidates were able to explore different kinds of paralysis and demonstrate that such examples indicated the desire of those in power to maintain this paralysis. Candidates who defined the terms of the essay clearly in their introduction were most likely to establish an effective argument.

There was a diversity of opinion concerning paralysis in Utopia itself, with some candidates opting for the more positive notion of stability instead. In either case, although both approaches were substantiated, there was significantly less discussion of *Utopia* than of the other texts studied.

Candidates in the A and B ranges were more likely to focus on the word "portray" and there were some sophisticated and interesting assessments of the ways paralysed societies were portrayed. Most candidates, however, were content to describe such portrayals.

In developing an argument, better scripts gave emphasis to both Books 1 and 2 of *Utopia.* Weaker scripts considered only Book 2. Few candidates attempted to deal with the genre of *Utopia*, with most content to refer to it as a novel and so treat it as such.

Few students looked carefully at the language and structure of the texts, even though both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* lend themselves to a discussion of the role of language in creating and maintaining paralysed societies.

Question 7:   The Novel of Awakening

Candidates seemed very comfortable with this question. Better scripts did more than list "limitations" and "opportunities", choosing to emphasise the process of recognition and link the two concepts. The best scripts were able to develop an argument which integrated a discussion of limitations, opportunities and character with the experience of an awakening, or awakenings.

Quite often, the first text written about (usually *Jane Eyre*) was discussed in intricate detail and, as the script progressed, discussions of subsequent texts became less detailed. Better candidates were still able to maintain a useful discussion in a more concise form but weaker candidates were unable to write fully about all three texts.

Scripts tended to be long and on the whole candidates knew the texts well and were confident. At the same time, many candidates could have been more selective in the detail they presented without sacrificing the quality of their argument.

The best scripts, again, dealt with more than just character. Writers of these scripts were able to stand outside the text and reflect on the art and form of each novel. They were able to understand the context and the thesis of each novel and to evaluate the impact on readers.

Question 8:   Modern Prose

The Modern Prose question suitably challenged candidates and the requirement to focus on 'tensions' proved to be the key discriminator. Candidates able to view non-fictional prose as a structured literary form were able to excel, while the less able tended to deal with 'movement and meditation', 'people and places' at the descriptive level and provided long accounts of journeys and settings with little analytical depth.

Of the five texts, Dessaix's *Night Letters* was approached most competently; here candidates dealt with the text with particular understanding and sensitivity. Numerous discussions of *Wild Swans* displayed evidence of candidates being overwhelmed by textual bulk and resorting to historical recount.

Question 9:   Australian English

Once again very few candidates studied this elective. Most of those who did had been soundly prepared and presented solid, if pedestrian, responses. More able candidates saw the possibility of different interpretations of 'local' and/or the potential stance that identified local usages but placed Australian language in a global context.

This year more candidates revealed an awareness of the effects of media and digital technologies on Australian English and drew their examples from a wider range of sources than in previous years. Passion for the language was evident, sometimes to the detriment of a rigorous, analytical response to the question.