This was the least popular question, attracting a slightly lower percentage of the candidature than Question 3. It was apparent that many of the weaker candidates misinterpreted the question and failed to acknowledge that Sandy’s cut hand revealed electrical circuits and computer chips instead of real flesh and blood. Many scripts were consequently confused and incoherent.

With the better candidates’ work, markers were generally enthusiastic about the creative and imaginative answers that the question brought forth and many reported that they enjoyed marking this question the most. The freedom to write an open-ended essay tended to attract strong candidates who possessed the extensive vocabulary and grammatical control that the question demanded. Some answers were very creative indeed and the general quality of responses belied the frequently-heard criticism that Hong Kong students lack imagination. Unfortunately a number of weaker candidates misunderstood the question and treated it as a simple home-accident situation. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of thoroughly reading the question and making sure that they fully understand it before they begin to answer.

One worrying aspect of this question was that it marked a return to fairly obvious and flagrant use of memorized passages. The dramatic nature of the opening and its potential for ‘cinematic’ narrative obviously proved irresistible for some candidates who wove examples of hackneyed metaphors into their essays. Corny expressions such as ‘on the verge of death’, ‘my heart was beating like a horse in full gallop’ and ‘my mind was like turbulent
`water` were such a regular feature of essays that it was obvious that many candidates had rehearsed a model essay which could be adapted to different narrative contexts. A full investigation into the possible existence of a `proto-essay` for narratives is currently being conducted. The use of metaphor *per se* is obviously an integral part of narrative essays, but when it becomes apparent that such expressions have been memorized and are not used appropriately, the penalties are severe.

2 56 This question was by far the most popular topic, attracting more responses than 1 and 3 combined. The use of computers in education is a hot topic at the moment and clearly many candidates were on familiar ground when dealing with the content. Markers were positive about many of the answers, describing them as relevant and interesting.

Perhaps one of the problems with a question that attracts such a large percentage of the candidature is that of distinguishing between the large number of candidates that fall in the middle range of ability. Markers reported that, too often, answers were very similar in content and it was frequently difficult to sort out the weaker candidates from the stronger ones in the 4/5/6 (out of 10) range. Many of the answers seemed predictable, taking a pro-computer viewpoint without really examining or discussing other possibilities. Weaker essays tended to present a general debate on the benefits of computers to society as a whole and in cases where there was no link to educational use, essays were penalised for lack of relevance. Stronger essays took a much more balanced view and not only presented both sides of the issues involved but were able to present argument and counter argument in a lucid and rhetorically appropriate style.

3 23 Picture questions are generally quite popular, especially with weaker candidates who look to them to provide an additional inspiration for
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content. This year was an exception - possibly because of the hypothetical nature of the topic. Most markers felt that the question was handled poorly by weaker candidates but encouraged good answers from those able to write fluently and maturely. Some had difficulty writing about stages of life that they had not yet experienced.

The use of illustrations in the question turned out to be a false friend for the very weak candidates, many of whom were led into describing potted autobiographies. Weaker candidates who had understood the question tended to use very simple sentences and repetitive formulas to deal with each age in turn. Answers were predictable and the content often childish. One marker despaired at the number of candidates that continue to spell baby as bady, despite the correct spelling being given in the question.

Stronger candidates were able to argue the pros and cons of each age much more convincingly, often with the use of rhetorical questions and a touch of humour. Very good candidates were also able to switch between the use of simple tenses to describe each age in a general sense (babies do nothing but eat, cry and sleep) and the use of modals to describe their personal preferences (I wouldn’t like to be a baby). Weaker candidates generally stuck to simple tenses throughout.

General recommendations

1. Planning and checking

Candidates must remember to take time at the beginning of the examination to read all the questions carefully. This will help them to understand what they have to write, what different essay styles are required, and what vocabulary is needed. They can then decide which topic they are best able to write about. About an hour should be spent planning and writing, with the last 10 minutes left for reading the essay.
through and making any necessary corrections. Spelling and grammar need to be checked, as many careless mistakes are made at the time of writing which can be easily corrected. Proofreading of written work should be developed as a regular habit.

2. Alternate lines

There has again been an increase in the number of candidates failing to obey the instruction: ‘You must write on each line’. This year there were 272 offenders who received mark penalties compared with 235 cases in 1999. It is important that candidates follow this instruction.

3. Candidates who write their own names on their scripts

Candidates who disregarded the Instructions to Candidates and the question rubrics by using their real names, either on the front cover of the script or as part of their compositions, are guilty of a serious breach of the examination regulations and are dealt with accordingly. In 2000, there were 19 such cases, up from only 2 last year.

4. Candidates who disobey the question rubrics by using names other than those specified

It will be readily appreciated that there are considerable problems involved in checking whether the 120,000+ candidates have used their real names or fictitious names in their compositions, especially if one of the tasks involves writing a letter. In order to keep this problem manageable, it has been necessary to stipulate in the rubrics what names should be used. The advice given is of two kinds:

(a) In specific instructions within a question:

‘Write a letter to the editor ...... Sign your letter S. Lee. Do NOT write an address’

(b) In a general rubric on the front cover of the question paper:

Do NOT use your real name in answering any of the questions. If names are provided in the question, you must use those names. If no name is provided and you still wish to use a name to identify yourself, then use ‘Chris Wong’. You will lose marks if you do not follow these instructions.
Candidates who used names other than their own, in contravention of the rubrics, were given nominal mark penalties for doing so. There were 85 cases in 2000, almost double the 1999 figure of 44. They were penalized if they used a Chinese name in the traditional three-character form (e.g. Chan Kwok-keung) or if they combined an English first name with a Chinese surname (e.g. Peter Chan). This year, the penalty was imposed whenever candidates included the name in the main body of the text (e.g. ‘My name is Chan Kwok-keung and I live in Kwun Tong. Last Sunday morning, I...’) or when they signed off their letter using the wrong name. Candidates are also warned that if the name they are asked to use in the question has an initial (e.g. S. Lee) they should not expand the initial into a full name (like Sally or Simon) as this can be construed as contravening the rubrics.

These regulations were interpreted flexibly and penalties were not imposed for using Christian names or surnames in isolation.

5. Memorization

This year the number of candidates submitting wholly or largely memorized work was 70, a disturbing increase on last year’s figure of 20.

Most of the memorized essays were produced in answer to Question 1. Some 40 answers to this question began with the phrase *Never have I been so close to the verge of death* and went on to include a number of similarly overwrought metaphors. Although these metaphors have clearly been chosen because they are applicable to a range of narrative situations, only the stronger candidates were able to use them to produce reasonably coherent stories, though these candidates still did not escape being penalized for using words which were clearly not their own. Weaker candidates produced essays which were almost complete nonsense, showing that they had little or no understanding of the expressions they had laboriously rehearsed. Three examples of this ‘proto-essay’ may be found in the Annex.

For Question 2, a few candidates produced memorized essays on technology in general, without applying it to schools, whereas Question 3 did not lend itself to memorized material of any kind.

A few candidates managed to keep the model essay ‘Fire in the squatter village’ burning for another year!
6. Content versus form

Different genres have different writing conventions, but while it is important to be able to master these conventions, it seems evident that in a great many cases, candidates are placing too much emphasis on form and not enough on content in their essays, whether they are providing arguments, discussing an issue, or simply telling a story. Candidates should think about and plan what they are going to say before they decide how they are going to say it. Using rehearsed modes of expression as a means of organizing what they write leads to, at best, stilted and artificial compositions, at worst, incoherent compendiums of stock phrases and memorized expressions.
Annex

Memorized Scripts

Script A

This is the work of a student who scored quite well in other sections. The memorized expressions are used reasonably competently but they are memorized nonetheless, and there seems to be very little original story-telling. This candidate was duly penalized.

Never in my life had I been so close to the verge of the death. I can now still remember it so vividly that it seems it has just happened yesterday.

It was the day when I was helping my friend Sandy prepare food in the kitchen. Looking through the window, I saw the sky reigned by thick, grey clouds so I had to turn on the light in order to locate my knife. Suddenly, the kitchen was completely dark and the knife that I was using slipped and cut Sandy on her hand.

Undoubtedly, I felt very sorry for her injury because of my timidness. When I looked at the cut I was shocked to discover that, instead of blood, there were wires, electrical circuits and computer chips under her skin. I could see her face turn pale at first. The moment I was about to run away from this mysterious scene, I heard Sandy roaring like a lion, gripping on a knife so as to strike it into my heart.

I seized my way to the street; however I almost could not find anyone on the road. The street was as silent as an oyster but the dead silent was then broken by Sandy’s crazy cry. Therefore, I ran as fast as I could, without stopping to gain a breath.

The further I ran, the louder was Sandy’s voice I could hear. Unfortunately, I was so frightened that I lost my way to the police station. So I hid myself in the corner of a building so that she could not find me in a moment.

My mind resembled turbulent water. I warned myself that I must not make a noise otherwise I would be discovered. My misfortune seemed to come from nowhere. Her moving silhouette and elongated shadow because larger and larger, my heart beat wilder and wilder like a horse in full gallop. I could no longer endure my fear caused by her dreadful footsteps. Summoning up all my courage, I tried to run away from her focus, exerting all my energy.

2000-CE-ENG LANG
I saw the police at the end of the street. The minute I escaped successfully and cried for help to arouse their attention, I was caught by Sandy and had a knife in my heart, bleeding like a stream of water. At length, I fainted.

I would appreciate my God to give me a new life. When I woke up, I found myself in a hospital and realized that Sandy was the criminal the police was looking for.
Script B

This script shows the same expressions used with a degree less accuracy, but there is more original content than Script A.

Never in my life had I been so confuse. When I was prepared some food in the kitchen with Sandy several weeks ago. Although almost three weeks had elapsed since the incident. I could recall the whole affair vividly as if it occurs only yesterday.

It was 15th April, 2000. I went to my friends Sandy’s birthday party. After playing some games, I helped Sandy to prepare some food in the kitchen. As I was not keen on cooking, I could not use my knife properly. Unfortunately, the knife that I was using slipped and cut Sandy on the hand. To my horror, I discovered that there were no blood flow out of the wound. I could clearly see that there were plenty of wires, electrical circuits and computer chips in the wound. I could do nothing but to still stood at that moment. My face paled with fear. I simply could not resist the outburst of my emotion. I could not believe what I saw. Suddenly, some smoke began to smoulder from her wound. Under her hair, I realised that there were so many buttons. She asked me to press the one which is red in colour. I pressed the red button. At the moment, the wound suddenly disappear. I could not find out any scar which left on her wound. What amazing she was!

After that, she told me that she came from Mars. She want to collect some information about the human being on Earth. She asked me not to talk to anybody about this incident. Eventually, I promised her that I would not talk to anybody.

Ever seen this incident. I had developed a fear for Sandy and whenever I went to my kitchen. I would conjure up a picture of how Sandy cut her hand and those electronic component.
Never in my life had I been so close to the verge of death. I can still remember very vividly. It gave me some shocked experience. I think I never forget it.

That was a day. Sandy called me to study English in her home; however, I very interesting of study English, I felt uneasy for that day. Struck 1 o’clock in the afternoon. I arrived at Sandy home, but Sandy didn’t have her lunch, when she prepare some food in her kitchen, at that time I went to helped Sandy. In the meantime Sandy prepare her food it look like good. But it not interesting for helped Sandy, because she to my horror, I always recall.

When she prepare her food, suddenly the knife was slipped, at the moment the knife pierce to Sandy hand; at that time she was crying very loudly, after all I was a man, I went to help Sandy. I discovered Sandy hand instead of blood and I can saw some wires, electrical circuits and computer chips. To my horror she was not people, once I said helped louder and louder, my foot to escape faster and faster. At that moment Sandy discovered me was explored she was not people, Sandy try to catch me, although I ran very fast and manage to all my power; however, Sandy grip me. I define to dead in that day, I would rather choose to dead in comfort.

My basic urge of the survival told me, I manage all my energy to escaped for Sandy. Although I could escaped for Sandy and went out her kitchen, Sandy try to grip me again. In the meantime she drew out a dagger and pierce me. I frighten of Sandy and my heart beating and beating, my mind resembled turbulent waters. Suddenly I lost my balance and fall in the floor. The moment Sandy arrived of me nearer and nearer. I through I define to dead in her dagger. At the moment my heart nearly jumped out of my body. But my basic urge of the survival told me again, I manage to all my power to escape and flight Sandy, because it could give me the ways of survival however Sandy look like strong, I try to attract her, she was damaged. When I escaped away.

Since this thrilling experience, every to see some wires, electrical circuits and computer chips I can notice Sandy very vividly. So I will never near of wires, electrical circuits and computer chips.
Paper 2

This year’s paper consisted of 95 items divided into two parts.

Part 1 – Comprehension – two reading passages with a total of 29 multiple-choice (mc) questions

Part 2 – Usage – an mc cloze (19 items)
   an open cloze (19 items)
   a matching exercise (10 items)
   an editing exercise (18 items)

As in previous years, the mc items, with a mean percentage correct of 56%, proved easier for the candidates than the non-mc items, which had a mean of 40% correct. On the whole, the paper was very discriminating and the facility values are similar to those of the past few years.

Part 1 Comprehension

The questions in this part carry two marks each. Passage A, ‘The Homeless in Japan’, was adapted from a British newspaper article about the plight of homeless people in Japan. Candidates handled this section fairly well and achieved a mean of 59% correct. Only one of the 14 questions, which tests inferencing skills, proved to be difficult for average candidates.

Q.5 The writer wants the reader to ..... the homeless after reading paragraph 4.

   * A. respect (58%)
   B. fear (11%)
   C. reject (15%)
   D. envy (16%)

In order to answer this question, candidates had to infer the intention of the writer in presenting the condition of the homeless in Shinjuku Park. 16% of the candidates, including some above-average ones, wrongly chose option D. Although the writer described the homeless people rather positively in the bulk of paragraph 4, he certainly did not intend the reader to envy them. In the last sentence, he said that they were ‘among the most isolated – rejected by the rest of society’. Candidates who had read the whole paragraph carefully, in particular the third sentence, correctly concluded that these homeless people were worthy of our respect because they were ‘dignified and independent’.

2000-CE-ENG LANG
Passage B, entitled ‘Crazy English’, was found to be slightly more difficult than Passage A. The mean percentage correct was 53%. This passage, which was about a new method of learning English in Mainland China, should be of interest to candidates since they are also English learners. In general, candidates performed satisfactorily in this section. However, two of the 15 questions seemed to have caused problems even for some better candidates.

Q.16 According to paragraph 2, Li includes music in his lectures because ……

A. it attracts more students. (21%)
B. students learn English from the music. (29%)
C. the lectures are partly a rock concert. (22%)
* D. it prepares students for the lesson. (28%)

Only 28% chose option D. These candidates correctly interpreted the second sentence – ‘Once the students reach a sufficient state of excitement, Li jumped onto the stage’- and realised that the purpose of the music was to prepare students for the lesson. Some good candidates went for option A, which seemed logically correct, but was not supported by evidence from the passage. Candidates must remember that they have to always base their answers on information from the text and not just guess the answer from ‘common sense’.

Q.23 In lines 63–64, ‘the word’ refers to ……

A. the English language. (30%)
B. the Chinese language. (4%)
* C. news of Crazy English. (41%)
D. English language radio programmes. (25%)

30% of the candidates wrongly thought that ‘the word’ referred to ‘the English language’ (option A). Apparently, they were not familiar with the idiomatic usage ‘to spread the word’, meaning to tell people about something, in this case about Crazy English.

Comments and recommendations

1. As mentioned in previous reports, the best way to prepare for a reading comprehension test is to read extensively outside the classroom. Intensive reading practice is necessary, but no substitute for a wide exposure to a great variety of English texts.
2. It was pleasing to note that this year, many candidates were able to satisfactorily handle global questions as well as questions focusing on specific information.

3. Many candidates seemed to have problems tackling inferencing questions. They should make an effort to master this important reading skill.

**Part 2 Usage**

*Multiple-choice cloze*

This cloze passage was adapted from a newspaper article about tourists being cheated in Hong Kong. The mean percentage correct was 55%, indicating that, in general, candidates performed fairly well in this section. However, three questions proved to be difficult for the majority of candidates.

Q.31 ‘...... a growing number of thieves and conmen are cheating tourists ______ (31) ______ the recession started, ......’

A. when (36%)
B. as (17%)
C. although (6%)
* D. since (41%)

It was disappointing that so many candidates failed to recognise that ‘since’ is the only grammatically correct choice because of the present continuous tense ‘are cheating’ used in the main clause.

Q.32 ‘...... one guest a day now ______ (32) ______ bags or purses being stolen, ......’

* A. reports (31%)
B. complains (44%)
C. claims (16%)
D. declares (9%)

Option B, ‘complains’, distracted 44% of the candidates, including some above-average ones. Candidates should note that although this verb seemed to fit logically, it should be used with a preposition - ‘about’ - in this linguistic context.

* For the non-mc items, the statistics quoted are based on a representative sample of 300 scripts.
Q.43 ‘...... each dissatisfied customer would tell about 15 people what had happened _____ (43) _____ them.’

A. on (44%)
B. to (28%)
C. for (14%)
D. about (14%)

Even some good candidates wrongly chose option A, ‘on’. As mentioned in previous reports, prepositions are common testing points in cloze exercises and candidates are well advised to pay particular attention to the correct use of prepositions.

Open cloze

This was found to be one of the more difficult sections of the paper, with a mean percentage correct of 41%. The passage was about a new invention called a ‘TV cycle’. Three of the most badly-handled items were Questions 50, 65 and 66. They were answered correctly by less than 10% of the candidates.

Q.59 If you say ‘yes’ to these questions, it is likely/possible that you will be interested in a new invention. (9%)

Many candidates put ‘shown’, ‘believed’, ‘proved’ or ‘meant’, thinking that a passive construction was required.

Q.65 & 66 In contrast/comparison, those with the TV cycles had watched TV and cycled for a total/maximum/minimum of 10 hours over the whole ten weeks.’ (8%; 10%)

Common mistakes for Q.65 included ‘addition’, ‘case’, ‘fact’, and ‘conclusion’. Candidates did not seem to have considered the meaning of the preceding sentence before filling in this blank, putting in any word that fitted grammatically. For Q. 66, many candidates put wrong answers such as ‘period’, ‘number’ and ‘lot’, again focussing on grammar only and not paying attention to the meaning of the sentence within the context.

Matching exercise

The mean percentage correct of this section was 39%. It required candidates to insert sentences in a text, an article about scented suits for men in Korea, so that the text would make sense as a whole. To do this, candidates had to
‘match’ a sentence with its preceding and/or following sentences to make sure that they formed a coherent paragraph.

Q. 76 proved to be most difficult item in this section.

Q. 76 Another satisfied customer said, ‘...... I’m getting a bit bored with the scent. I’m hoping that they’ll bring out some different ones soon.’ This is precisely what the manufacturers are currently working on. LG fashion also plans to extend into scented casual clothes...’ (24%)

As discussed in earlier reports, candidates should note that they could use a number of different clues to make the correct match, such as lexical cohesion and reference. In these sentences, ‘they’ referred to ‘the manufactures’, which in turn referred to ‘LG fashion’ in the next sentence, and ‘This’ referred to ‘bringing out different scents’.

It is suggested that candidates should read through the whole text to get a general understanding of the passage before attempting to match the sentences. They should not work at sentence level only.

Editing exercise

Candidates achieved a mean percentage correct of 39% in this section. They had to proofread and correct mistakes in a short story entitled ‘The Haunted Flat’.

The following items caused problems for most candidates:

Q. 79 She had recently changed into a new flat in the countryside... (15%)

Many candidates deleted ‘into’ or ‘had’ instead of changing ‘changed’ to ‘moved’.

Q. 82 ...... I went straight to the bed. (9%)

The majority of the candidates did not know that the definite article ‘the’ should be deleted. The correct expression is ‘to go to bed’. Many thought that there was no mistake in this line.

Q. 91 ...... an elderly lady was used to live there on her own. (16%)

Most candidates wrongly changed ‘on her own’ or some other part of this line, not realising that ‘was’ should be deleted.
Q. 92  ..... she was too old to live on herself...... (19%)

Not many candidates managed to correct this mistake by changing the preposition from ‘on’ to ‘by’. It was surprising that less than one-fifth of the candidates seemed to be familiar with this very common expression.

Comments and recommendations

1. This year, most candidates were able to follow instructions. However, a small number had problems with the format of the editing exercise and put their answers in the column marked ‘Marker’s Use Only’, rendering many of their answers incomprehensible. A few candidates lost marks because they used a letter more than once in the matching exercise. Candidates are advised to read the instructions and given examples carefully before answering the questions.

2. In general, candidates handle multiple-choice questions better than the more open-ended usage items where an element of productive skill is required. Candidates should make an effort to improve their performance on such items not only by doing practice exercises but also by using English in their everyday life. For example, getting into the habit of proofreading compositions, whether their own or their classmates’, is good preparation for doing editing exercises, and more interesting and practical than simply doing exam practice papers.

3. As mentioned in last year’s report, a wide variety of usage items may be included in this paper. Candidates should not limit themselves to the item types and formats commonly found in exam practice books and past exam papers. They should be able to handle new item types and variations in format. Again, the best way to prepare for this paper is developing language skills through extensive exposure and meaningful use.
Paper 3*

This paper consisted of two parts. Part A, which was divided into four listening sections, was worth 10% of the total subject mark. Part B, the integrated section, was worth 22%. On the whole, candidates performed better in Part A than in Part B, achieving a mean percentage correct of 57% and 51% respectively.

Part A Short Tasks

Before the listening tasks began, candidates were given time to scan the first two sections of the question paper to get the gist from the reading material.

Section 1 (Mean percentage correct = 60%)

There were five multiple-choice questions in this section. After listening to the question and a short conversation, the candidates were required to choose the correct answer out of the four options by listening for specific details.

On the whole, candidates performed quite satisfactorily in this section. The easiest question was No. 5, with nearly three-quarters of the candidates choosing the correct option, whereas nearly two-thirds of the candidates failed to score the mark for No. 2.

Question: What is the woman going to bring for the barbecue?

Man: Are you coming to our office barbecue?
Woman: Yes, I’ll buy the charcoal if you like.
Man: Well, actually, I’ve got plenty left over from last time.
Woman: That’s good. OK, then I’ll bring some chicken wings and sauce
Man: And I’ll bring some sausages......
Woman: Don’t bother...... I’ve got plenty in the freezer. I’ll bring those.

Many chose option B (Charcoal, chicken wings and sauce) when the correct answer should be option C (chicken wings, sauce and sausages). The reason could be that candidates jumped to the conclusion too early without finding out whether charcoal and sausages served as a reliable clue or just a distractor. They had to decide their choice by following the whole dialogue and eliminating all the distractors.

* The statistics used in this Report are based on an item analysis of a sample of 300 scripts.
Section 2  (Mean percentage correct = 50%)

This section called for the completion of forms, tables and diagrams while candidates listened to a short conversation or recorded message. There were four short tasks with 20 testing points. The overall performance in this section was only satisfactory. Candidates encountered difficulty in the following areas:

In Question 7, candidates were asked to complete the information about the book while listening to a recorded telephone message. Most of them found it hard to differentiate the speech sounds ‘th’ and ‘s’, and ‘k’ and ‘g’ and misheard the word ‘think’ as ‘sing’. The title of the book should be ‘How Children Think and Learn’. Some failed to locate the word stress for the publisher ‘Blackwell’ and wrote it as two separate words ‘Black Well’.

Candidates were required to fill in the missing information on the bar chart in Question 8. Quite a large number of candidates failed to draw the bar for the year 1980. The possible explanation was that the figure was not directly given and they had to do some simple calculation after listening to the description on the tape, ‘The figure for 1990 ..... stands at 185, a decrease of 10, compared to the figure for 1980.’

In Question 9, candidates had to make corrections on the students’ timetable for a course. Some did not follow the instructions on the Question-Answer Book and forgot to cross out the wrong information. Quite a large number of candidates lost a mark because they did not know that the time slots were inter-related with each other and failed to correct ‘12.30 p.m.’ twice. Nearly three-quarters of the candidates did not understand the implicit meaning of the message, ‘We’ll finish half an hour earlier than planned’ and failed to change ‘5.30 pm.’ to ‘5 pm’.

Section 3  (Mean percentage correct = 46%)

In this section, candidates had to assume the role of an estate agent, responding to clients who were looking for property to rent. When listening to the clients’ requirements, they had to complete the two forms with 13 testing points.

The overall performance of the candidates was quite disappointing. They did better in the parts requiring them to fill in the preferred location and the size of the property required. But they performed less satisfactorily in the following areas:
In the first form, over two-thirds of the candidates failed to score the mark for ‘2-bedroom flat’. The term seemed to be rather unfamiliar to many of the candidates. Others lost this mark because they ignored the word stress in ‘bedroom’ and wrote it as two separate words.

Another item which candidates handled poorly was a special feature to be included in the first form – ‘roof garden’. Again many candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with this term and gave nonsensical answers like ‘root garden’, ‘wood garden’ and ‘wolf garden’.

Most of the candidates had difficulty with large numbers and ordinal numbers. They managed to write 3-digit numbers for the size of the property but failed to register numbers exceeding ten thousand for the price range. They also confused ‘first’ and ‘third’ in ‘ground floor or first floor’, one of the special features for Q.11.

Many candidates would have done better if they had included only the relevant and necessary words in their answers. For example, it was not necessary to put ‘suitable for restaurant’ as the type of property required, but some candidates just wrote down what they heard: ‘Yes, I’d like to rent somewhere suitable for a restaurant please.’

Other candidates failed to score marks if they simply put down what they thought they had heard without considering carefully whether their answers made any sense. A few weak candidates even misinterpreted the message and wrote ‘two large windows’ when they heard ‘Yes, it must have large windows, too.’

Spelling and capitalization of proper names were problems in this section this year. The most common misspellings were ‘see view’ as ‘sea view’, ‘resturant’ as ‘restaurant’, ‘falt’ as ‘flat’ and ‘Causway’ as ‘Causeway’ while ‘University’ and ‘Bay’ were often written without capitalization of the first letter.

Section 4 (Mean percentage correct = 70%)

This section was an extended listening task in which candidates were asked to assume the role of an interviewer for a survey on pollution in Hong Kong. They were given some time to familiarise themselves with the questionnaire before the conversation began. While listening, they had to fill in the questionnaire with 18 testing points.
This was the best-answered section in Part A. The topic was familiar to most candidates and they were generally able to follow the conversation. They performed well on the items where they had to tick the appropriate box(es).

However, over half of the candidates took it for granted that only one of the boxes under the same subheading could be ticked. They were not aware of the fact that the subheading ‘Problems noticed’ suggested there could be more than one problem. They therefore lost a mark by choosing the most serious problem instead of the three problems the woman interviewee mentioned.

Words that were commonly misspelt included ‘cotton’, ‘environment’, ‘shopping’, ‘public’, ‘transport’ and ‘room’.

General recommendations

1. Candidates should write their answers tidily and legibly. They should cross out any unwanted answers neatly and make sure the amendments are easy to read. They can perform better if they make full use of the time given to tidy up their answers. They may lose marks if their answers or corrections are ambiguous.

2. They should be careful with spelling and capitalisation of proper nouns. This can be improved by enriching their vocabulary through everyday activities like reading the newspaper, listening to pop songs, watching films and surfing the Internet.

3. They must be aware that effective listening involves not only recognition of speech sounds. To fully understand what they are listening to, they should decipher the message the speaker is conveying using both linguistic and paralinguistic cues. This will help them to be more sensitive to what they listen to and to respond more appropriately in different situations.

4. They should get more practice on scanning and skimming. This is essential in order to fully understand the requirements of different listening tasks. Before they start listening, they should scan through quickly the information given so that they can focus their attention on the specific information needed. They should also make a habit of skimming through the instructions and headings or sub-headings given so that they will better understand what answers are required.

5. They should build up confidence in their English listening skills by exposing themselves to a variety of English accents, different speeds
of delivery, spoken texts of varying lengths and various ways of presentation.

6. They should be exposed to more authentic spoken texts and be made aware of the discourse structure of various communicative activities, e.g. booking a table, presenting statistics, leaving a recorded message and conducting an interview.

Part B Extended Tasks

In the situation given, candidates had to take up the role of the lead singer of a pop group, ‘The Image’, which was going to perform in the 2000 Hong Kong Youth Arts Festival. They were provided with a Data File which contained a number of texts – a draft programme of the Festival, an article from a school magazine, an entertainment page of a newspaper, a review from a music magazine, an advertisement for The Hot Metal Band performance, a poster for The Image performance and the press release guidelines for jotting down relevant points while they listen to a briefing session where members of the band were informed about how to prepare for the Festival.

Candidates were asked to do two tasks:

1. Complete a press release giving information about their group

2. Write a letter to the Hong Kong Youth Arts Festival Programme Coordinator asking for a change of performance date and giving the reason for their request.

As in Part A, candidates were given some time to scan the Data File and the Question-Answer Book to familiarize themselves with the situation and the two writing tasks. In particular, they were instructed to read the press release guidelines and the draft programme before the listening task began. To complete both tasks, they had to take notes on the press release guidelines as they listened and extracted relevant information from the Data File and the Question-Answer Book.

Task 1

This task was divided into two parts. Candidates completed Section A of the press release form (Task 1A) with the details of the performing group and their coming performance in the Festival. Then they had to write a brief history of the group in Section B of the form (Task 1B). Candidates’ performance in Task 1A was far better than that in Task 1B.

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Candidates had little difficulty extracting relevant information from various sources in the Data File and the spoken input to complete Task 1A. However, they performed less well in four of the 18 items.

Over half of the candidates assumed that each band member should have one role only and that there should be six members in the band since there were six blank spaces in the form. They lost marks if they missed the second role of Paul Lau and Liz Walker or included any other names as their answers. Quite a large number of them put Mandy Lo on the list as one of the group members, ignoring the fact that she had already left for Canada and was no longer a member of the group.

Nearly three-quarters of the candidates failed to score a mark because they filled in the last three blanks (performance details of date, time and venue). It was a result of candidates not paying enough attention when listening to the briefing session. Alice Lindsey, the Festival Organiser, specifically told the group not to ‘put the new date, time and venue’ in the press release until they had got ‘confirmation from the Programme Co-ordinator’. They were told to ‘leave these blank for the time being’.

In Task 1B, although the overall performance was not satisfactory, it was encouraging to note that quite a large number of candidates were able to keep their use of pronouns consistent throughout the short piece of writing and to organise their writing according to the press release guidelines given.

However, there was still quite a lot of fragmented and disorganised writing about the history of the band. Many of the candidates failed to put the events in chronological order. Some repeated information unnecessarily. This showed that they probably just copied relevant sentences as they came across them in different reading texts and did not make an effort to organise the information.

Another major problem was the listing of content points without clear contextualisation. For example, many candidates lost marks because they simply mentioned that the group performed at the Chinese New Year concert and the farewell concert without giving the relevant context – when they were still at school. Similarly, if they simply listed out the different nationalities of the four group members without making reference to the idea that the group was international in nature, they would not score the four marks.

Copying indiscriminately from the Data File was quite common. Some weaker candidates even copied directly from the Data File without changing the tense or personal pronouns. It was not difficult to spot sentences like ‘She
will be going to Canada to further her studies’ or ‘We soon had a regular gig at On the Edge club, where we play every Saturday night’. Better candidates, however, were able to extract the relevant information and express it in their own words. For example, instead of copying the whole sentence ‘Liz here has lived in Hong Kong all her life but is American’, they wrote ‘Liz is American’.

Some candidates did not read the instructions carefully enough and made up a title for the brief history. It was not necessary since they were only asked to complete Section B of the press release and the instruction was already there: ‘Give a brief history of yourself / your group’. Perhaps they assumed that the bonus mark ‘T’ meant ‘title’ from their practice of past papers. In fact, candidates would be awarded this bonus mark for using an appropriate text type.

Some candidates lost marks by making spelling mistakes which could have been avoided if they had spent time proofreading their work and cross-checking with the Data File, e.g. they wrote ‘Paul’ as ‘Pual’, ‘Canada’ as ‘Canda’, ‘farewell’ as ‘fairwell’, ‘Johnny’ as ‘Jonny’, and ‘Indonesia’ as ‘Indoesia’.

Task 2

Candidates performed more satisfactorily in this task than in Task 1B. Most had no problems with the complimentary close at the end of the letter but ‘Yours sincerely’ was frequently misspelt or miswritten as ‘yours sincerely’, ‘Yours Sincerely’, ‘Yours faithfully’, or ‘Yours truly’. Most of the letters showed reader awareness since many candidates were able to provide important background information to the reader by mentioning the name of the band in the letter.

However, since most of the content points came from the briefing session, the majority of candidates had difficulty jotting down notes properly with which they could have scored higher content marks. Examples of major spelling mistakes which affected meaning were ‘driving test’ as ‘diving test’, ‘driving text’ or ‘driving taxi’, and ‘confirm’ as ‘conform’. Four-fifths of the candidates failed to mention the content point that Alice Lindsey, the Festival Organiser, had agreed to the change of the performance date. Nearly half of them missed Alice Lindsey’s instruction during the briefing session that in the letter they only needed ‘to give the reason for not being able to play on the 5th of November’. Instead, many explained why the band could not perform on other days and so they were not able to score the bonus mark for not including irrelevant information in the letter.
Quite a large number of candidates managed to follow the instructions given for this task and specified the purpose for writing this letter. But their tone of asking for a change of performance date was inappropriate and sometimes even rude, e.g. ‘I want you to change the date ......’ and ‘I inform you to change the date ......’ These candidates lost some language and style marks for using the wrong register.

General recommendations

1. When given instructions, questions and a wide range of reading materials in the Data File, candidates should adopt appropriate reading strategies based on the type of reading required, e.g. skimming, scanning or reading for specific details. They should not treat all types of texts with the same degree of attention.

2. Candidates are reminded that Part B of the paper tests the integration of reading, listening and writing skills. Some instructions and content points may only be extracted from the listening input and effective note-taking skills are important for completing the tasks.

3. Candidates should not guess what the bonus marks mean from their experience of doing past papers. The award of bonus marks depends on the requirements of the situation and the tasks. They should be alert to the appropriate format, the purpose of writing, the intended reader and the genre of the piece of writing when they do the writing task.

4. Candidates should develop the skills of extracting relevant information from various kinds of written texts and spoken discourse based on a clear understanding of the purpose of the task.

5. Candidates should reorganize the data extracted from various sources intelligently. After gathering the relevant information, they should make an effort to contextualize it and present it coherently and logically in distinct paragraphs.

6. Candidates are encouraged to manage their time well in an examination. Besides completing all given tasks within the limited time, sufficient time should be allowed for editing/proofreading. This is a vital step to ensure correct spelling, language accuracy and effective completion of communicative tasks.

7. Students must be exposed to a variety of authentic texts including
letters, timetables, notices, posters, advertisements, reviews, brochures, articles, minutes, agendas and so on. This can strengthen their confidence in reading and understanding various genres in English writing and adopting appropriate language for different types of writing.

8. Students should make use of every opportunity in their daily life to learn English and to enrich their basic understanding of English life and culture, which can improve their knowledge of the language and how it works in the real world.

Paper 4

As the examination format has now been in use for five years, most candidates, except some private candidates, were familiar with it. Consequently they did quite well in the Role Play. This is obviously the result of much drilling and practice in school. What is good about this is that candidates can handle the examination reasonably well but what is bad is that the performance seriously lacks spontaneity and much of what the examiners hear is only stock expressions. On the other hand, the group interaction, which is less controlled, was not so well handled by candidates this year.

Another major problem is audibility. The main purpose of the oral examination is to test candidates’ communicative ability, but many of them spoke so softly (especially words whose pronunciation they were not sure of) that examiners could hardly hear them. Speaking softly, in fact, is very much to candidates’ disadvantage.

Part A Role Play

Candidates’ introductions

Only a few bright candidates could introduce themselves properly and naturally. The rest either introduced themselves mechanically by making use of a few stock expressions such as ‘Do you mind answering me some questions?’ (in which ‘me’ is a redundant word and is a direct translation from Chinese) or just reading out the situation on the question paper without even changing the pronouns. The weakest ones did not even introduce themselves.
Asking questions based on the headings of the interview form

The main problems are:

(i)  Poor questioning techniques

One wonders why after learning English for at least 11 years, candidates are still unable to ask a proper question. Questions like ‘Where you sleep?’ or ‘When you get your last illness?’ occurred frequently.

(ii) Misunderstanding headings

On ‘Month of last illness’, candidates asked ‘How many months of your last illness?’

On ‘People looking after you’, candidates asked ‘How many people looking after you?’

It seems that for many things of which they were not sure, they used ‘How many’. There was also much confusion between ‘How much time’ and ‘How many times’, which would elicit completely different answers.

(iii) Mispronunciation of common words


(iv) Wrong tenses and subject-verb agreement

The tense is important in asking questions. For the heading ‘Places visited, (for a tourist who had finished touring Hong Kong), if a candidate asks ‘What places will you visit?’ he will not get the needed answer from the examiner. And even brighter candidates made mistakes in the agreement of subject and verb, such as ‘Writing and pronunciation is difficult.’.

(v) Wrong gender

Confusion of ‘he’ and ‘she’.
(vi) Confusion of ‘to be’ and ‘to do’

  e.g.  ‘Are you enjoy doing this part-time job?’
  ‘How long did you absent?’

(vii) Candidates’ sixth questions were on the whole relevant and so quite well done. However, some particularly inquisitive candidates did not seem to be satisfied with asking only one additional question and continued to ask a seventh or even an eighth question. Considering the time limit of the Role Play, this is not a sensible thing to do because they may not have enough time to complete Task 2.

Reporting

(i) This is rather well done, as far as communication is concerned.

(ii) Indirect speech was sometimes not properly used.

(iii) Quite a number of candidates reported only one piece of information when two pieces of information where given by Examiner 1, thus losing marks.

Recommendations for Part A

a. More practice is necessary, and if possible, candidates should try to do some real interviews with native speakers. When practising, candidates should make use of the simulated situation and introduce themselves and ask questions spontaneously rather than apply memorised stock expressions to the situation. Other than practising, it is also of vital importance to listen to accurate and proper English and try to imitate this.

b. When an examiner asks a candidate ‘What do you mean?’ there must be something wrong with the candidate’s question. However, the candidate need not be nervous and give up. He should try to rephrase the question to improve it or pronounce the words more correctly.

c. Candidates should be reminded that when reporting to Examiner 2, they need to report all the information, that is, when there are two pieces of information, if they report only one piece, they do not get a mark.

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Part B  Group Interaction

A small percentage of the candidates could do the discussion naturally, with ease and some enthusiasm. However, the majority had problems in developing an argument, constructing grammatical sentences and finding the right words to express their ideas. With the weaker ones, inaudibility is another big problem.

There was a serious lack of interactive skills. Most of the time candidates did not know how to ask for clarification and even when they did, the clarification from another party was often still ineffective. And most of the time candidates took turns to express their own ideas, rather than to contribute to a coherent discussion.

Many stock expressions were used, among them, ‘I agree with you’ which was one of the most popular. Even to a nonsensical statement, some candidate would say ‘I agree with you’ because they did not know how to ask for clarification or because they did not know how to disagree or because they were not confident enough to raise a new point.

Other problems were lack of sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas and lack of common knowledge and sense of logic.

Recommendations for Part B

a. Students should take advantage of every opportunity they have to speak English, preferably with native speakers.

b. To acquire a wider vocabulary and to improve their pronunciation, students should listen to English programmes on the radio.

c. Reading, especially the newspaper, can also help students both to acquire a wider vocabulary and to improve their common knowledge.

d. Some language teaching specialists are of the opinion that reciting a good piece of writing such as a neatly written essay or a beautiful poem may help boost confidence and improve fluency.