

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US)

Paper 0524/13  
Reading Passages (Core)

## Key Messages

- It is important to read both passages and questions carefully and to focus on the key words in the questions.
- The writer's effect **Question 1(g)** requires concentration on defining the *word* in italics in the first part of the question, and explaining the overall effect of the *whole phrase* in the second part.
- Careful reading of introductions to the passages is also important.
- Careful attention to basic punctuation and grammar is important when answering **Questions 2 and 3**.

## General Comments

In general, candidates at all levels of achievement were able to engage successfully with the question paper. Nearly all candidates coped successfully with the revised format of the exam although a very small minority made the error of answering the questions in relation to the wrong text. The introduction of a discrete summary task based on a second reading passage meant that summary skills were tested more specifically than in previous examination series, with added scaffolding for candidates' responses. The most successful showed clear awareness of the wording of the question and precisely selected relevant points as their notes to **3(a)** and then turned these into a well organised summary clearly focused on conveying the key points concisely and objectively in **3(b)**. The less successful responses identified relevant details in **3(a)**, but appeared not to have grasped fully the principles of summary writing, resulting in lengthy and frequently unfocused summaries for **3(b)**. The two parts of the summary task are now worth 30 per cent of the total marks for this paper and Centres are advised to ensure that their candidates are well prepared with the techniques to answer this task successfully.

Most responses to **Question 2** indicated that candidates were interested in the subject matter of Passage 1 and were able to respond at sufficient length. The changes in the paper's format mean that twice as many marks are now available for Reading than are given to Written Expression. It is, therefore, important that candidates understand that this is a response to reading question and that the points that they make in their writing must refer to details in the original passage and any development of these points should derive from these points or other suggestions that can logically be inferred from the original. A significant number of candidates achieved this very successfully and produced convincing and interesting articles describing their experiences and going on to give clearly thought out advice about making such a trip. Less successful responses, however, revealed an incomplete understanding of some of the basic details of the passage or tended to simply repeat details from the original passage. A large number of responses showed at least some attempt to write in an appropriate style and register.

It is important to emphasise that although there is now a maximum of only five marks available for Written Expression for **Question 2**, candidates should, nevertheless, take care in structuring their writing through paragraphs and concentrating on making their writing technically accurate – in particular, ensuring that sentences are demarcated by full stops and not commas, and that elementary vocabulary is spelt correctly and consistently. A significant number of responses showed real quality of sophisticated thought and logic.

Most candidates managed their time well and produced responses of adequate length to all questions; there were, however, a minority who made no response to **3(b)**, the last question in the paper, and others where the **3(b)** responses were brief and obviously rushed.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### Question 1

- (a) This proved to be an accessible question for the candidates with the majority securing the one mark available for 'hunter'.
- (b) This was also an accessible question and a large number of candidates gained two marks. The most commonly identified detail was that there are polar bear patrols. The second point was that there are large warning signs. It is worth commenting that a small number of candidates confused the details required for this task and those required for **1(c)**.
- (c) As with **1(b)** a large number of candidates identified the two points (that residents leave their doors unlocked and that they keep a loaded gun handy). However, a small number of candidates confused the details required for this question and for **1(b)**. Candidates should always read the questions carefully.
- (d)(i) Candidates had to offer a sufficiently detailed answer to get both marks. There were three possible points to make – that it is a large truck, it has a raised observation section and that is made from strong metal. Centres are encouraged to stress to future candidates that a question such as this, that carried a maximum of two marks, requires two distinct points to be identified for a fully correct answer.
- (ii) A large number of candidates correctly identified the essential point: that the observation section was high off the ground to prevent bears from jumping up.
- (e) Most candidates were able to gain one mark by focusing on the fact that the bear moved silently. However, very few made the further point that the writer was surprised when what had appeared to be a 'hump of snow turned out to be a bear'.
- (f) Again, a large number of candidates correctly commented on the writer being impressed by the apparent innocence of the bear's eyes. Very few made a further point that the writer found the experience awe inspiring, memorable or 'heart-stopping'. It is worth noting that although this might seem a very obvious point there is often a mark to be gained by stating the obvious (with the additional caveat, as above, that a two mark question does require two clear points).
- (g) The format of the 'writer's effect' question has changed from previous examination series. The first part of the question tests a candidate's understanding of the meaning of specific words used in the passage. The words that should be explained are italicised in the phrases quoted at the beginning of the question and the candidate should explain their meaning in the context in which they are used. The explanation may take the form of a one word synonym, an explanatory sentence or phrase or even an appropriate exemplification of their meaning. The second part of the question requires a comment on how the writer uses language *in the whole phrase* to create a particular effect in the mind of the reader (this is clearly stated in the wording of this part of the question). Centres are strongly encouraged to focus on developing future candidates' working vocabulary and understanding of how different words with similar meanings can carry a range of different associations and implications. The following comments refer to the specific words that candidates were required to explain for part (i):
- *Battered* – acceptable synonyms would be 'beat' or 'break down' or any word/phrase that implies use of force,
  - *Clambered* – for this word a perfectly acceptable synonym would be 'climbed'.
  - *Lounging* – another way of expressing this might be 'reclining in a leisurely manner'. A reasonable number of candidates put something to this effect and gained the mark. However, they were many candidates who did not know what the word meant and were not able to work that out from the context.
  - *Meandered* – this could be explained as 'wandering aimlessly'. As with the previous point a reasonable number of candidates managed to give a clear explanation, but there were many who did not understand the meaning of the word.

As mentioned above, a productive area of focus for all Centres is to explore how to respond to questions relevantly to this type of question, by commenting appropriately on the reasons for the writer's choice of language.

### Question 2: Reading

Most candidates responded well to the passage and were able to create a convincing voice. However, as the task required the candidates to write in the same voice as that of the original passage there was a tendency to rely a little too heavily on the original (especially in choice of vocabulary) in a lot of cases. The more successful answers were those that dealt with each bullet point in turn in order to structure their response. Some candidates, however, were too focused on the contents of the original to develop the ideas in response to the second and third bullets. There were, however, a reasonable number of responses that did step back from the content of the original to develop the ideas they had identified into a convincing piece of informative writing with a style suited to a magazine. A small number of less successful responses addressed all bullet points in such general terms that it was unclear whether they had actually used the original passage in creating their answer. The least successful responses merely copied from or summarised the account in the passage. In preparation for future examinations, it would be worth Centres reminding their candidates that, although there is a certain amount of creativity involved in this response, the question is testing the extent of each candidate's understanding of the text. Of the 50 marks available on the paper, 40 (i.e. 80 per cent) relate specifically to Reading. It is therefore essential that their responses are firmly grounded in the texts under analysis.

Among the positive points noted in the candidates' performances were the following:

- Good use of facts from the text and use of detail to give a convincingly personal response to the encounters with the bears.
- Good suggestions that might persuade readers to make a similar trip.
- Appropriate use of form and register.

### Question 2: Written Expression

Most candidates wrote enthusiastically, managing to create a convincing account of the trip. The focus of the descriptors for Written Expression is now on organisation of material, range of appropriate vocabulary, and appropriate register and this enabled many candidates to score quite highly on this aspect even when there were serious errors in spelling and punctuation, for example. The majority of responses achieved Band 3 or above. Paragraphs, generally, were used confidently, particularly where the three bullet points were used as a structural guide and some candidates wrote eloquently and accurately throughout. The main limitation of candidates' linguistic expression, however, was in sentence structure, largely as a result of comma splicing.

### Question 3(a): Summary Points

Most candidates scored reasonably well on this task and successfully identified what they had learned about Polar Bears and why they are endangered. The question did not require own words and many candidates copied sentences and phrases from the passage. Many candidates did not sequence points under the two sections or divide the 10 points equally which again was not asked for in the question but which might have been of help when writing their response to **3(b)**. Some candidates, however, did not write enough in their selected responses so the context of the point was unclear and resulted in the marks not being given. Some divided what was essentially one point over a number of answer spaces, for example, listing the diet as a series of individual points (point 7). One / two word answers were rewarded if the context was clear. Future candidates should be encouraged to make sure that they have identified the essence of a point when answering in their own words and that the point they have identified is not generic. It is also worth being clear that while these are described as 'Notes', it is necessary to make each one a sufficiently detailed note. There was a reasonable spread of points identified by the candidates as a whole with no particular one causing problems.

Candidates are advised to:

- Make a clear statement of points and not join them together.
- Avoid repetition – the statement of the same point twice, using slightly different words.
- Only make one point per line.
- Make sure that where an answer extends beyond the allocated space for a point, it is clearly identified that it is part of that point.

- Avoid adding extra points to the grid over and above the 10 answer rows printed on the answer sheet.

Some candidates tended to write as many points as possible on the first line, which was often detrimental to their score on this question.

In all, there were 14 relevant points that could have been made in response to this question:

**Information given about Polar Bears in the passage:**

- Covered in insulating white fur
- Swift runners/cover great distances
- Expert swimmers
- Live in the Arctic
- Life span of c. 25 years
- Maximum of 25,000 in Arctic wilderness
- Eat a range of foods (e.g. fish, seal, grass, etc.)

**Threats to their survival:**

- First animal to be categorised as/endangered because of global warming/climate change
- Endangered by habitat loss
- Could become extinct
- Hunted for their hides/hides are very valuable
- Hunted for sport (from aeroplanes)
- Oil extraction in the Arctic Ocean poisons/pollutes seawaters and affects food supply
- Free roaming creatures so difficult to protect

**Question 3(b): Summary**

In general, the majority of candidates showed that they had a sound understanding of the passage, used the scaffolding provided in part (a), and most achieved marks in the Band 3– 2 range. It is important when answering this question that summaries are clearly focused on the specific points required by the question and that candidates avoid irrelevance, repetition and subjective comment in their responses. The most successful attempts at this question competently used the points identified in 3(a) to build a focused response which was concise and showed the ability to achieve synthesis of one point with another.

Although key phrases were often lifted from the passage, there was little evidence of indiscriminate copying from the text and it is hoped that in future examination series, as candidates become more at ease with the requirements of this important skill, the number producing focused and concise responses will rapidly increase.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US)

Paper 0524/21  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key Messages

This paper was mainly assessed for **Reading** (40 marks). In addition, there were up to ten marks available for **Writing**: five marks in **Question 1** and five marks in **Question 3**. Candidates are advised that in order to aim for high marks in this component they should:

- read both passages very carefully, including any introduction offered to a passage
- read the questions carefully, paying attention to the guidance offered
- pay attention to each section of a question
- spend time planning responses to address the specific requirements of each of the tasks set
- use a range of appropriate vocabulary
- select only the material that is appropriate for the response to the question
- check and edit their responses carefully
- plan the structure and sequence of the material in responses
- adapt writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- ensure that ideas are developed and fully explained in **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

## General Comments

Candidates' responses to this paper indicated familiarity with the demands of each task, along with an awareness of the need to use material from the passages to answer the questions. Responses covered the full range of bands for each question. Though there were occasional examples of candidates replaying the text and/or writing at a tangent rather than addressing the detail of tasks specifically, most appeared to have been entered for the appropriate tier and were able to demonstrate understanding of both tasks and texts.

Responses to the tasks suggested that candidates had found the passages accessible and engaging, had planned their use of time and had finished within the two hours. Instances where candidates had missed all or part of a question were extremely rare across the cohort as a whole. Most candidates had paid attention to the guidance offered with respect to the length of their answers and many appeared to find the numbering of the bullet points in the answer grid for **3(a)** a helpful reminder of the need to offer 15 points, one per line.

There were very few significant misunderstandings of the general content of the passages, though there was evidence that some candidates needed to pay closer attention to the detail of texts. For example, in responding to Passage A **Question 1**, a number of candidates muddled speakers, characters and ideas – referring variously to Anuja as a journalist, Dr Misha and/or a man. Careful attention to detail, including revisiting the passage to refine understanding, is essential if candidates are to offer convincing evidence of their reading skills at higher levels.

Copying was rarely an issue in **Question 1**, though on occasion when outlining arguments candidates were over-reliant on quotation from the passage. Replaying over-long sections in lieu of explanation of key ideas in their own words was a feature of a number of the less successful answers. Candidates are reminded that in order to demonstrate the skills necessary for higher bands, they need to use and interpret the evidence in the text – explicit and implicit – standing back from the passage in the light of the question. Details from the text should be used to inform and support their ideas, rather than be repeated mechanically.

Answers to **Question 2** showed an awareness of the need to consider and explain meaning and/or effect rather than simply label devices. Those who had taken note of the instruction to select four choices in each half appeared to have benefitted from that advice – taking time to consider which four choices they could offer most profitably in each half. Consequently, they were able to offer a range of potentially interesting selections, to discuss each of their choices at some length and even go on to suggest some of the links between the images used. For higher marks, candidates need to ensure that they are making precise and

appropriate choices of words and phrases, as well as considering their use in context. These choices need to be explored and explained in some detail to show understanding of how the writer is using language in the particular instance under consideration.

In **Question 3** responses, it was encouraging to see that many candidates had understood the need to identify 15 distinct points from Passage B in part **3(a)** and then organise these points into a fluent, concise prose response using their own words in **3(b)**, using the additional scaffolding provided in this revised question structure. There was evidence that the instruction that they did not need to use their own words in **3(a)** had been understood – some chose to use their own words when it helped to distil examples into the essence of the idea and selected from the language of the text for other more straightforward points. On occasion, weaker responses offered overlong sections from the passage rather than the short notes suggested in the guidance, meaning points became blurred and/or were repeated. For higher marks, candidates should ensure that they capitalise on the opportunity when planning their prose response in **3(b)** to revisit and refine as required their points in **3(a)**, for example to avoid repetition of ideas in these notes.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and editing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression.

Many responses were generally clear and/or showed some sense of audience in **Question 1** and most were aware of the need to adopt a more informative style in **Question 3**. Whilst writing is not assessed in **Question 2**, candidates should ensure that they consider carefully the precision and range of their own vocabulary when attempting to describe the effects and meanings of the selections they are discussing. In some instances, candidates might have been able to demonstrate more convincingly understanding of the language used by the author had they used vocabulary more precisely themselves and/or avoided repetition, including that of the language of the text itself. Likewise, checking and editing all three answers more thoroughly might help some candidates to ensure they are offering secure evidence of their skills to examiners.

### **Comments on Specific Questions**

#### **Question 1**

**Imagine you are a journalist from the local newspaper at the meeting.**

**Write a newspaper report about the meeting.**

**In your newspaper report you should:**

- **describe the atmosphere and the reactions of the crowd at the meeting**
- **give your impressions of the two speakers and the arguments they made**
- **suggest what will happen next**

**Base your newspaper report on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.**

There were some particularly convincing responses to **Question 1** with detail woven in, sustained development and a clear journalistic approach. The question provided useful prompts, with both the opening line and the reference to a 'local newspaper' allowing candidates to write from an insider's point of view, crafting the material for a definite audience and purpose. The understanding that this was a newspaper article was rarely in doubt, with candidates' answers ranging in style from the homespun local broadsheet, with appropriate bias and use of first person, to a more formal, measured, 'editorial' style offering analysis of events and possibly urging action or ways forward as suggestions of the long term possibilities. At the top end, responses demonstrated a strong sense of purpose and approach, ensuring their readers had both a clear sense of the events and the arguments, and picking up on clues to offer informed speculation as regards future possibilities. Where responses were less successful, the intended audience and purpose had often been forgotten, with information and ideas not fully explained or explored and/or the reader left potentially confused with only a partial overview. Candidates at various levels did recognise the need to interpret rather than simply record events, though sometimes missed what was at the heart of the debate – the nature of the common land itself – and what it represented to the two speakers. A very small number of responses were completely detached from the specific content of the text, writing creatively around the

themes, offering at best evidence of only a very general understanding of the passage.

Stronger responses to the question used ideas from the passage carefully and consistently with their audience in mind – evaluating and modifying the material and often integrating both A1 and A2 whilst tracking the events of the meeting. On occasion, stronger responses began with an overview of events and their implications, then expanded and explored ideas in the body of the piece, before looking towards the future and what might happen next. Some used carefully selected, apt quotation to good effect in keeping with their chosen journalistic style. Where quotation was less selective and involved longer chunks of text, it provided less convincing evidence of careful reading. A number of answers at the lower end showed little awareness of the need to modify the material, being over-reliant on quotation to communicate ideas and replaying at length what Mr Carmichael and Anuja had said in furtherance of their cause. Responses quoting whole sections verbatim from the two speakers were often self-penalising – at best mechanical and tending towards lifting/copying. Even in newspaper reports, candidates need to be reminded to keep actual quoted phrases from the text to a deliberately chosen minimum.

Better answers offered some adroit assessments of Mr Carmichael – finding him calculating, greedy, untrustworthy and quite set apart from the locals. Anuja was often seen as passionate, courageous and sensitive to hearts and minds. Some offered alternative views, criticising Anuja for being naive and living in the past, missing the chance to bring potential prosperity to the lives of malnourished locals and valuing animal welfare over human. Where this interpretation was considered alongside the relative likelihood of Foodfreight making good its promises, there was potential for evidence of close reading – for example, exploring Carmichael's vagueness as regards jobs as well as Anuja's acknowledgement that the land had been neglected and evaluating the arguments effectively. Those who criticised Anuja and took Carmichael simply at face value, believing him to be purely philanthropic in his motivation missed a number of hints as well as something of the tone of the passage. There were some interesting observations on the economic conditions in which the local people existed and the resulting dilemmas that the proposal threw up for them as a rural community reliant on hunting to supplement their nutrition. It was noted by a number that many were not well-fed and that the refreshments provided were a tempting taste of the possibilities of things to come. Some though made assumptions outside the text, drifting too far from the evidence in the passage – for example some asserted that those present at the meeting worked for Carmichael and whilst he was well fed, he had not fed his workers, showing him to be uncaring and cruel. There was no suggestion in the passage that Carmichael and/or Foodfreight employed anyone locally. Development of ideas has to be rooted in the passage.

Generally, whilst there was no shortage of detail in answers, not all of it was relevant and/or helpful. Often carefully selected details did support key ideas and were found throughout answers, not just as scene-setting at the beginning. However, a small number of candidates relied on repeated detail and paraphrase as the basis of their response, failing to tease out the main ideas during planning stages and often then struggling to offer suggestions in A3. Where candidates simply worked chronologically through the passage revisiting/paraphrasing sections of detail, they often missed opportunities to offer evidence of competence as readers.

Better answers understood the need to read through the passage and select, then identify and organise their ideas to address the specifics of the task. They spent time recognising which aspects of the text the question was inviting them to consider and how best to evidence their skills and understanding.

Some of the best answers interpreted events and details from the local journalist's standpoint rather than simply recording them, noting the twists and turns in the audience's reactions as well as deriving some satisfaction from noting Carmichael's (foiled) attempt to win over his audience. Even some relatively modest answers were able, for example, to recognise Carmichael dropping his façade and revealing his true intentions once things were no longer going his way.

Strong answers had decided on the style of their article in advance and maintained this throughout. Where candidates had considered their audience and purpose less carefully and followed a more formulaic response, the overall effect at times suffered. Spaces drawn for pictures, even artist impressions of Rufus and/or text written in columns are unlikely to be a good use of time when writing a newspaper report in timed conditions and often detract from concentration on the structure and style of the piece itself.

Some candidates used the bullets in the question to shape their response, occasionally to good effect. Often better answers had used the bullets as a means of planning content to ensure coverage and then gone on to think about how best to present the material. Where answers worked through each bullet in turn rather than use them for planning, A3 was often incomplete and/or absent once 'word count' had been reached. Candidates are reminded that the word count of 250–350 words is there for guidance, suggesting the length of response it is expected a candidate might need to address the requirements of the task within the time

scale of the examination. Over-long and/or very brief responses are likely to be self-penalising but counting the exact number of words is neither productive and/or useful. Overall quality, range and depth of the answer are far more important than the quantity of words used.

In mid-range answers, uneven treatment of the bullets might often have been addressed at the planning stage – in part by paying attention to the instruction in the question to consider in A2 both the speakers and the arguments they made. Often A2 offered only part of the picture – prosperity and bribes were usually touched on but less often were the arguments concerning the relative and conflicting views of the wildlife/ value of the land considered. For a number of ideas both sides of the argument were presented in the text – stronger responses recognised and made use of this. In some of the best answers, promised prosperity and potential jobs were balanced by concerns about local hunters no longer having access to deer, whilst overgrown, unproductive land was defended as ancient woodland to be protected as a reserve for wildlife rather than destroyed by developers. Comparing the details of what was said on both sides during the planning stage of an answer would have helped to establish key points of focus and offered opportunities to develop those in terms of impressions of both arguments and speakers.

Offering a quite limited range of points was a feature of some less successful answers. Even in mid-range answers, reference to prosperity as if that were the only argument offered by Carmichael was not unusual. Similarly, Anuja's argument was sometimes reduced to a vague sense of history and/or culture, perhaps with a reference to wildlife. At lower levels, some responses ignored altogether one aspect of A2 – either offering loose impressions not supported by reference to any of the arguments or only touching on a little of what was said without comment. As a result, useful opportunities to offer evidence of close reading and/or develop ideas were missed.

The third bullet was often the least well-covered of the three. A significant minority of candidates addressed it only in their final sentence. There was a tendency to generalise and/or say 'I don't know what will happen in the future' especially where responses up to that point had been reliant on the order and/or language of the original. Stronger candidates were able to make a number of points and develop them convincingly in this section. Some used Rufus's threat 'We will get our way!' along with the reaction of the crowd to him at the end as a starting point for suggestions.

### Advice to candidates on Question 1

- read the passage carefully and return to check key details as you plan your answer
- answer all parts of the question, giving equal attention to each of the three bullet points
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- take account of the given persona, audience and purpose for your response
- leave sufficient time to edit your response
- extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include – do not just repeat them

### Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of:

- (a) the common land in paragraph 6, beginning 'The meeting resumed...';
- (b) Rufus Carmichael in paragraph 13, beginning 'Rufus' face tightened...'.

Select **four** powerful words or phrases from **each** paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase selected is used effectively in the context.

Rather than offering a series of notes for each example selected, more successful responses to **Question 2** often took the form of continuous prose, allowing candidates to explore their choices fully and connect their ideas where appropriate. Though candidates should analyse and explore each of their selections, responses that simply list possible ideas miss opportunities to extend the discussion and offer evidence of understanding at a higher level. Partially effective explanations are a feature of mid to low range answers and are often the result of a failure to explain fully the precise meaning of words selected and/or how exactly each specific example is working within context. Marks are given for the relevance of the words and phrases chosen to answer the question, and for the quality of the analysis. Credit is given in **Question 2** for the ability to select a range of interesting or unusual examples of words and phrases relevant to the focus of the question in each section. Responses that go on to explore and explain meanings of the words are awarded further marks. Responses that also explore the effects of the use of particular words and phrases on the



reader can score up to the highest mark of ten.

The most successful responses to **Question 2** showed precise focus at word level, dealing with individual words within key phrases, having purposefully selected a number of the strongest examples in each half, including images. These responses answered both parts of the question equally well, unpicking choices in each half to consider exactly how these were working in the context both of Rufus's speech to his audience and the writer's intentions. Stronger answers were able, for example, to recognise the bias in the language used to describe the common land and explain the sense of threat Carmichael was trying to create. In part **(b)**, recognition of the humour and/or cartoon-like representation of the thwarted Carmichael was often a feature of stronger answers.

Less secure understanding led some candidates to suggest more factual language choices such 'banged his fist' and 'tall trees', along with choices not linked to the focus of that part of the question – for example 'rose to speak' in part **(a)** was not a relevant choice in relation to the land. Others offered incomplete choices where only one word from the whole image had been selected – for example some responses offered 'undesirables' without 'lair' and/or 'vermin' without 'haven'. Where candidates opted for less well-focused choices, they limited what was achievable in terms of the overall quality of their analysis and diluted the evidence of their understanding.

Some candidates showed a good awareness of the rhetorical intention of some of their choices, a few noting the irony in Mr Carmichael's intention to remove an 'eyesore' and get rid of 'undesirables', but some tended to generalise this rhetorical purpose, without carefully unpicking the language in support of their claim. Few candidates struggled to identify potentially relevant examples in each half, though many candidates only offered literal meaning for choices selected. Whilst this can be a useful starting point, to target marks in the higher bands responses need to consider the suggestions, connotations and associations of the language used, analysing how the words work together to create the overall image. Candidates who fared best in part **(a)** often suggested something of the gothic/fairy-tale nature of the language. Those who saw the repeated sense of suppression of rage, fit to burst, had the nub of effects in part **(b)** and did well if they showed how this suppression was manifest in each choice. Often, however, in mid to low range answers, general comment along with repetition of the idea that anger was being shown was as far as the discussion went.

The very best answers were often equally careful in both halves to unpick the layers of meaning in relation to choices. Strong responses to part **(b)** for example considered how 'compressed' suggested almost industrial levels of force applied, linking it to 'tightened' and the 'thin line' to suggest an imminent and inevitable outburst. Some considered the 'thin line of anger' as indication of the fragility of Rufus's control – it could break at any minute. Answers at this level often considered the uncontrolled nature of the word 'sprang' – a release of pressure as the dots of perspiration betrayed Rufus's inner rage. Good answers in part **(a)** often did more than explain that the negative image of the common land – whilst they noted for example that it was dark and lacked sunlight as indicated by heavy shade, they went on to examine the words used in more detail, considering the implications of heavy as suggesting weight and consequently something of its oppressive nature as if it were burdening the land and locals.

There was some evidence that a small number of candidates had spent time counting the exact number of words in their response. This is not necessary and is unlikely to be a good use of their time. Guidance on the length of the response is offered to indicate the likely length required to address a task successfully. Responses that offer significantly less or attempt to write substantially more may well be self-penalising, either leaving insufficient opportunity to explore choices in detail or putting themselves under unnecessary time pressure and resulting in less precise and carefully focused explanation. Similarly, answers that chose to ignore the advice to offer four choices in each half were in danger of either offering insufficient evidence of understanding and/or less targeted responses containing a number of less effective or even inappropriate choices, diluting the evidence that they understood how language was being used.

Less successful responses tended to offer superficial, half-formed ideas, frequently heavily-reliant on repeating the language of the original. In attempting to spot devices rather than respond to the specific examples in context, some answers missed opportunities to move beyond Band 4. For example, the assertion that 'an impenetrable thicket, a haven for vermin, a lair for undesirables' was an example of 'the power of three' was far less profitable than consideration of each of those choices in turn and then an examination of how they combined specifically to create the overall build-up of effect.

For the most part, candidates were able to show that they at least recognised potentially interesting examples of language use and offered at least some sense of the meanings and/or effects of their selections, even if only in a generalised way at times. Imprecise use and understanding of vocabulary limited a number of explanations in this question though, as did errors with individual words: rooks was at times

misread as rocks, haven often misread as heaven and lair on occasion as layer. For marks in the candidates need to be careful to select and interpret choices accurately, consider them carefully in and demonstrate that they are thinking about and exploring how the language is working. Quality of rather than feature spotting needs to be the emphasis.

The following example, taken from a candidate's response in this examination series, is given as an indication of a suitable approach to this type of question. It is not intended to be a model answer and might well have been improved further:

**(a) the common land in paragraph 6, beginning 'The meeting resumed...';**

*The overall impression of the common ground is one of disgust and horror. The area bordering the river is described as an 'eyesore' connoting the idea that it is so immensely ugly that it causes physical pain on those who perceive it, emphasising its grotesque nature. In addition, the shadows made by the trees are portrayed as 'heavy shade'. The use of the adjective heavy implies that the absence of light acts as a painful burden to those underneath the trees, evoking a sense of discomfort. Moreover, the weeds metaphorically 'choke the ground'. The use of such a violent verb, normally associated with strangulation and murder, connotes the weeds to have a conscious level of malevolence, as though their instinct is to cause suffering, evoking fear in the reader. Furthermore, the thicket is described as a 'haven for vermin', the juxtaposition of haven usually depicting a scene of paradise and vermin a word used to describe disgusting unhygienic creatures reflects the contrast between the apparent beauty of the land and the reality of its vile nature. The thicket is then described as a 'lair for undesirables', the word 'undesirables' is deliberately unspecific in order to allow the reader's imagination to conjure a fearful image, evoking terror. Lastly, the sounds emerging from the canopy are described as 'raucous, unending cries' the use of a non-finite adjective emphasizes the eternal nature of the pain experienced by the creatures of the canopy and the word cries portrays the sounds as perhaps human-like evoking pathos in the reader. Such vivid description helps to effectively illustrate the barbarity and vile nature of the scene.*

**(b) Rufus Carmichael in paragraph 13, beginning 'Rufus' face tightened...'**

*The general depiction of Rufus Carmichael in paragraph 13 portrays him as a man filled with anger and impatience. His face 'tightened into a grimace' – the word tightened has connotations of pain and torture, emphasizing Mr Carmichael's discomfort and lack of control over the situation as if someone else were forcing his face to contort in pain. His lips are then described as 'thin line of anger', the simplicity of this description emphasises his lack of temper and the figurative portrayal of his lips being anger itself show the magnitude of his rage. The sweat on his forehead 'sprang out', the verb sprang evoking the inevitable nature of the action as a result of Carmichael's stress and lack of control over his appearance is therefore illustrated providing reason for his discomfort. In addition, it is described that a dark cloud passed across his face. This figurative reference to nature shows the magnitude of his emotional instability as though his range equates to that of a god able to manipulate nature. Finally Mr Carmichael is described as 'panting', such dehumanisation illustrates his thought processes to be as simplistic as a dog's as though his anger is merely the result of instinct. Such use of language and imagery portrays Carmichael to be both irrational and even savage at times.*

**Advice to candidates on Question 2**

- ensure that all your choices are relevant and identified precisely using quotation marks
- take time to choose the best examples within each paragraph rather than listing possibilities
- when offering a phrase as a choice, discuss how each of the words within it is working
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- avoid generalised, 'empty' comments, such as 'the words help us to imagine it more clearly'
- if you are unsure about effects, start by offering a meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label choices, discuss them in some detail

### Question 3

(a) Notes

How is the osprey adapted to ensure its survival and what threatens its continued existence?

Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line. You do not need to use your own words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.

(b) Summary

Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells us about how the osprey is adapted to ensure its survival and what threatens its continued existence.

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.

Your summary should include all 15 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 200 to 250 words.

Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your writing.

Pleasingly, the majority of candidates had understood that in a question testing their ability to 'select for specific purpose' they needed to identify just 15 points in **3(a)** and that further answers added on after the 15 would not be credited unless replacing a crossed out answer earlier on. Some candidates, however, carried on beyond 15, sometimes as far as 30 or more 'points'. Where candidates think they have potentially identified more than 15 points, they should reflect on their final choices to offer a list of just 15 clearly focused ideas. Selecting and identifying distinct points meant that candidates had to read and plan their answers carefully both to avoid repetition and to organise their ideas sensibly. There was more than one way in which points could be logically grouped and these options were reflected in the mark scheme. There were a total of 20 potential points available from this one passage allowing generous leeway for candidates looking for 15. Most were able to identify a good number of these points from the passage. Better, more focused, answers typically scored two thirds or more of the available content marks. Those offering extended lists often showed signs of having worked through the passage chronologically rather than organised their answers with the focus of the question in mind and missed opportunities to score well. Candidates are reminded that the question instructions ask for short notes – long copied sections of text are unlikely to demonstrate the focus required to identify clearly the point to be credited.

**Question 3(b)** responses that did well had used their points from **3(a)** carefully – organising them purposefully into a concise, fluent prose response rather than relying on repeating points in the order or language of the passage. There was some suggestion that answers at the top end had revisited points in **3(a)** during the planning stages of **3(b)** in order to edit and refine points in this part of the question – leading to clearer more distinct points in **3(a)** and an efficient and well-focused response in **3(b)**. The two parts of this question are designed to work together, to provide candidates with a clear structure for their response in **3(a)** and an opportunity to revisit points selected when working on **3(b)**.

To answer this question successfully, candidates needed to first identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question, listing them clearly – one per numbered line, in note form. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one mark per line. Candidates are not required to use their own words in this part of the question, though better answers had often chosen to do so for clarity, for example where points were implied and/or exemplified more than once in the original text. Those who relied on identifying points from the text by working through chronologically often repeated points – typically in relation to guns and shooting and/or destruction of habitat. Reflecting on potential answers during planning stage would have helped a number of these candidates to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point and/or avoid repetition of ideas.

There are no marks to be scored for writing in **3(a)**; however, checking responses for accuracy in spelling and grammar is clearly essential if candidates are to avoid the potential danger of negating points through careless slips. Candidates should pay particular attention for example to correct any spelling errors that might change or cloud meaning – navel rather than nasal passages was a surprisingly common error.

The majority of candidates demonstrated an awareness of the appropriate style for a summary, with some examples of copying, though occasionally some attempted to simply reword sections of the passage and added further speculation and detail, resulting in less well-organised and concise answers. The most successful responses re-ordered and re-grouped the relevant information from the passage, with a clear focus on both aspects of the question (adaptations and threats). The best answers had considered carefully both the content and organisation of their answer, writing in fluent sentences, within the prescribed length and using their own words as far as possible. They avoided writing long introductory statements and making comments, and concentrated on giving a factual objective summary with ideas linked logically and presented clearly.

### Advice to candidates on Question 3

- read the question carefully and underline the key words which identify the focus of the task
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify potential content points required
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted to establish and select 15 distinct points
- list your points – one per numbered line – clearly and precisely, using as few words as possible
- plan the structure of your response in **3(b)** – for example organising and sequencing content logically
- write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- be careful to give only information that answers the question
- you can choose to use your own words in **3(a)** and must use your own words in **3(b)**
- do not add further numbered points in **3(a)** past the 15 required
- pay attention to the guidance for length in **3(b)**
- do not add detail or examples to the content of the passage
- avoid repetition of points.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US)

Paper 0524/23  
Reading Passages (Extended)

## Key Messages

This paper was mainly assessed for **Reading** (40 marks). In addition, there were up to ten marks available for **Writing**: five marks in **Question 1** and five marks in **Question 3**. Candidates are advised that in order to aim for high marks in this component they should:

- read both passages very carefully, including any introduction offered to a passage
- read the questions carefully, including any specific guidance offered
- pay attention to each section of a question
- spend time planning responses to address the specific requirements of each of the tasks set
- use a range of appropriate vocabulary – avoid copying from the passage
- select only the material that is appropriate for the response to the question
- check and edit their responses carefully
- plan the structure and sequence of the material in responses, e.g. to avoid repetition
- adapt writing style to suit each task, taking account of voice, audience and purpose
- ensure that ideas are developed and fully explained in **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

## General Comments

Candidates' responses to this paper indicated at least some familiarity with the basic demands of each task, along with an awareness of the need to use material from the passages to answer the questions. Many candidates were able to respond appropriately to the passages, some with real engagement. Responses covered a range of levels of achievement, often varying over the three tasks.

Responses to the tasks suggested that candidates had found the passages equally accessible, had planned their use of time helpfully and had finished within the two hours. Instances where candidates had missed all or part of a question were rare across the cohort as a whole. Most candidates had paid attention to the guidance offered with respect to the length of their answers and many appeared to find the numbering of the bullet points in the answer grid for **3(a)** a helpful reminder of the need to offer 15 points, one per line.

There were very few significant misunderstandings of the general content of the passages, though there was evidence that some candidates needed to read and interpret the detail of both texts and tasks more carefully. Careful attention to detail, including revisiting the passage to refine understanding, is essential if candidates are to offer convincing evidence of their reading skills at higher levels.

In **Question 1**, most responses were appropriate in the form of a letter to the father's parents and used the three bullets as a framework. Candidates are reminded that in order to demonstrate the skills necessary for higher levels, they need to use and interpret the evidence in the text – explicit and implicit – standing back from the passage in the light of the question. Details from the text should be used to inform and support their ideas, rather than being lifted word for word or repeated mechanically.

Answers to **Question 2** showed at least some awareness of the need to identify relevant choices and consider and explain meaning and/or effect. Those who had taken careful note of the instruction to select four choices in each half appeared to have benefitted from that advice – taking time to consider which four choices they would offer in each half. Consequently, they were able both to offer a range of potentially interesting selections and to discuss each of their choices at some length. For higher marks, candidates need to ensure that they are making precise and appropriate choices of words and phrases. These choices each need to be explored and explained in some detail to show understanding of how the writer is using language in the particular instance under consideration.

In **Question 3** responses, it was encouraging to see that many candidates had understood the need to identify 15 distinct points from Passage B in part **3(a)** and then organise these points into a fluent, coherent prose response using their own words in **3(b)**, using the additional scaffolding provided in this revised question structure. There was evidence that the instruction that they did not need to use their own words in **3(a)** had been understood. Candidates may choose to use their own words when it helps to clarify a point and select ideas in the language of the text for any other points. For higher marks, candidates should ensure that they capitalise on the opportunity when planning their prose response in **3(b)** to revisit and refine as required their points in **3(a)**, for example to avoid repetition of ideas in these notes.

Though Paper 2 is primarily a test of Reading, candidates need to keep in mind that 20% of the available marks are for Writing, split evenly between **Questions 1** and **3**. It is important that candidates consider the quality of their writing – planning and editing their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, imprecise meaning and awkward expression.

Most responses had some sense of audience in **Question 1** and were aware of the need to adopt a more impersonal, informative style in **Question 3**. Whilst writing is not assessed in **Question 2**, candidates should ensure that they consider carefully their own choices of vocabulary when attempting to describe the effects and meanings of the selections they are discussing. In some instances, candidates might have been able to demonstrate more convincingly understanding of the language used by the author had they used vocabulary more precisely themselves. Likewise, checking and editing all three answers more thoroughly might help some candidates to ensure they are offering more secure evidence of their skills.

A clear focus on the specific instruction and wording of a question during the planning of an answer will allow candidates to work to identify relevant detail in the text, cover all aspects of the task and target marks at the higher levels.

### Comments on Specific Questions

#### Question 1

**‘You are Sunitra’s father. Write a letter to your own parents – Sunitra’s grandparents – asking them for financial help with the project to buy land and materials for your new home.**

**In your letter:**

- **describe the place you have found and why it is perfect for you**
- **persuade your parents that there are benefits for Sunitra, despite her objections**
- **suggest what the other attractions are of this plan to move and how you imagine life will be.**

**Base your letter on what you have read in Passage A, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.**

The best answers balanced the three sections of the question.

For bullet one, it was necessary to consider the place and why it is so perfect through discussion of ideas relating to the area, the immediate environment of the trailer/caravan, weather, and wild life – all prompted by detail in the passage. Remembering the audience and specific purpose for the task, candidates needed to plan their responses to present a positive and persuasive view of the place itself. It is likely that the father would enthuse about its attributes to his parents. Often this first bullet was covered with some success.

In bullet two, candidates needed to both identify Sunitra’s likely objections and defend the benefits to her as her father sees them. Ideas here which were rooted in the text related to Sunitra’s friends and social life, the location, new school, even new language or accent, and how she sees her parents. Responses generally showed a good level of success for this bullet too; the father was either sympathetic to Sunitra’s concerns, or was sure that the ‘natural world’ would soon compensate for Sunitra’s losses.

The third bullet was most often the least well-addressed. In this section of the response, candidates needed to plan to cover ideas and suggestions connected to how the father imagines life will be and how/why that is attractive to him. This bullet point required candidates to ‘think around’ the clues in the text, for example suggesting ideas connected to the father working on the house, mother’s new job, fulfilling the dream of living far from the city, closer family bonding, a healthier life-style and Sunitra’s parents rekindling their relationship.

It cannot be emphasised enough that careful reading of the instructions and helpful information preceding the passage will help candidates to focus their responses correctly. Having read through the passage, candidates needed to understand that they must manipulate the viewpoint, becoming Sunitra's father, who is enthusiastic about building the family home in an isolated location.

The question required a 'shift of viewpoint,' testing the skill of candidates in using what they have read. Those who did not 'become' her father, but rather recounted Sunitra's situation from the passage with little modification, lost sight of the purpose and audience for their task, as well as missing opportunities to demonstrate evidence reading skills at a higher level by using ideas. Simple repetition of the material did not make sense in the context of the request for financial help. Taking on the father's persona allowed each idea to be developed through his eyes.

As this is a test of reading, rather than creative writing, drifting too far from the text to offer new ideas did not attract marks: ideas related to the family starting a farm, building a 'granny flat', or having more children are beyond the focus of the question and were not rooted in textual detail.

Candidates are reminded that the word count of 250–350 words is there for guidance, suggesting the length of response it is expected a candidate might need to address the requirements of the task within the time scale of the examination. Over-long and/or very brief responses are likely to be self-penalising but time spent counting the exact number of words is neither productive and/or useful. Overall quality, range and depth of the answer is far more important than the quantity of words used.

Reliance on the wording of the passage was a feature of some weaker answers. Some responses paraphrased whole sections or copied phrases, sentences or even paragraphs, which could lower both the mark for reading, and that for writing too. Certain phrases were especially attractive: 'empty vastness,' 'middle of nowhere,' we 'honeymooned in this area, trekking a long distance path, sleeping in a tent and cooking under the stars,' or 'a luxury house with stunning views.'

It is important that these are rephrased rather than lifted 'word for word'. For example, 'We feel so free and safe after the pressure of life in the city,' 'We explored the trails and camped nights with only the stars for company,' and 'We can build a much better home with room to invite you to stay and gee, what an outlook!' all show a good level of understanding by using the material and reworking it, rather than simply lifting sections from the text with little modification.

The question tested understanding of ideas, both explicit and implicit – for example as regards previous events. It made demands upon candidates' understanding of vocabulary and required some careful inference regarding the personality of Sunitra as well as that of her father. Responses needed to adopt a suitable register for asking parents for help. It therefore follows that the wider the variety of texts familiar to the candidates, the more understanding they can bring to bear on the question.

There was occasional difficulty with individual words, for example, slab, swollen, consuming, funnel, flimsy and swirling. Similarly, details of the question, situations and events were sometimes misread. These included Sunitra as the writer, her father moving to go to a job and Sunitra leaving home alone. Despite these occasional misunderstandings, answers were generally clear and showed at least some focus on the given bullet points. Many represented a mature son's letter to his parents with some skill, adopting a suitably informal tone for a letter to a close relative.

Mid-range responses were able to use the passage reasonably well but missed opportunities for relevant and sustained development. They relied more on the order and often the wording of the passage. Keeping the focus on addressing the bullet points during planning stages will help candidates to make a full response firmly based on the text.

The least successful answers retold some of the ideas unselectively, simply repeating the given information for the second bullet and/or were thin in content. Sometimes one or more sections hardly had a mention. Some invented 'back' stories, or even events and different characters outside the text – none of these provided evidence of close reading.

The mark for writing took account of overall style, including structure and order of the writing. Typically, clarity of expression, appropriateness, and fluency would be evident at higher levels, along with convincing character and sound structure. Candidates who made an attempt to take on the persona of a son writing to his parents were often able to create some sense of a voice and could attract a higher mark as a

result. Awkward expression, sequential or structural problems were the main reasons for a lower mark.

### Advice to candidates on Question 1

- ensure that you adopt the correct voice and persona by reading the question carefully
- read the passage carefully and return to check key details as you plan your answer
- answer all parts of the question, giving equal attention to each of the three bullet points
- adapt material from the passage to make it an appropriate response to the specific task set
- plan your answer to ensure that the material is sequenced logically and to avoid repetition
- leave sufficient time to edit your response
- extend and develop relevantly a number of the ideas you include – do not just repeat them.

### Question 2

#### Re-read the descriptions of

- (a) the view from the caravan/trailer in paragraph 2, beginning ‘She glanced out of the caravan/trailer window’;
- (b) the weather and the stream in paragraph 7, beginning ‘Last night the wind...’

Select **four** powerful words or phrases from **each** paragraph. Your choices should include imagery. Explain how each word or phrase selected is used effectively in the context.

Rather than offering a series of notes for each choice, more successful responses to **Question 2** often take the form of continuous prose, allowing candidates to explore their choices fully and connect their ideas where appropriate. Though candidates should analyse and explore each of the examples they select, responses that simply list possible ideas miss opportunities to extend the discussion and offer evidence of understanding at a higher level. Partially effective explanations are a feature of mid to low range answers and are often the result of a failure to explain fully the precise meaning of words selected and/or how exactly each specific example is working within context. Marks are given for the relevance of the words and phrases chosen to answer the question, and for the quality of the analysis. Credit is given in **Question 2** for the ability to select a range of interesting or unusual examples of words and phrases relevant to the focus of the question in each section. Responses that go on to explore and explain meanings of the words are awarded further marks. Responses that also explore the effects that the use of particular words have on the reader can score up to the highest mark of ten.

The most successful responses to **Question 2** showed precise focus at word level, selected a number of key examples in each half – making sure they fitted the question – and were aware of the need to balance both parts of the question. In some cases, candidates were able to bring together their ideas to offer an overview of each section, though needed to remember to provide plenty of text-based evidence in support. Candidates would generally have benefitted from more careful discrimination between strong choices and those less likely to provide evidence of interesting use of language.

Mid-range responses offered mainly suitable selections and attempted at least some explanation of related ideas and associations. Where incomplete or overlong phrases were included, comments tended to be equally imprecise, offering little evidence of understanding at word level. On occasion, several phrases were given at once with a general comment on them all, rather than the individual unpicking necessary to target higher marks.

Some candidates avoided over-generalised comments by starting with ‘dictionary definitions’ and moving to connotations. Those who considered words precisely might well have begun to discuss the more sinister motives suggested by the description of the mist as ‘creeping’. Those who picked up on the general idea, needed to go further and explain exactly how this was achieved. “‘Mist creeping up the valley’ gives the impression of fear’ is at best a partial explanation.

The least successful answers offered a sparse selection of examples, often mixed with unsuitable phrases. This was sometimes caused by a failure to consider carefully the specific focus of the question. Candidates who had lost sight of the task, selected unsuitable phrases from the paragraphs, for example, ‘Idly fiddling with the mouse’ or ‘huddled inside.’



The following example, drawn from responses this series, indicates one of the ways in which candidates approached this question. It is not intended as a model answer, and might well be improved, though it shows understanding and includes a sufficient number of appropriate choices.

- (a) **'wove through'** This phrase describes the track's movement through the brush. Weaving is a motion where a thread is led through a loop. Describing the path as 'weaving' gives it a twisted feeling.
- 'swollen'** This word is used to describe the stream. Something swollen is unnaturally full, almost to the point of bursting. By describing the stream as swollen, it makes the stream seem overfull of water to emphasise where it might be spilling over its banks.
- 'creeping'** describes the mist's movement along the valley. Creeping is usually a slow, hunched-over movement like some sort of stalker or bug, slow and careful. It gives the feeling that the mist is sliding over the valley almost like a snail across a board. This gives the mist a lethargic feel.
- 'blanking out'** this phrase is used to describe the mist covering the trees so that they disappear. It is a phrase used sometimes when something slips your mind, leaving you with a large expanse of nothing. Empty things or things that have been erased are generally white; the trees have been erased away into whiteness.
- (b) **'smacked'** this word describes the force of the wind on Sunitra's eyes. Smacking is a harsh, sudden movement that usually results in a stinging behind or a sore hand. By describing the wind as smacking Sunitra's eyes, it gives a feeling of stinging eyeballs and tears collecting due to the pain, giving the wind a violent characteristic.
- 'pounded'** this word is used to describe the wind in Sunitra's ears. Pounding makes a loud noise because of hitting the object. Here, Sunitra's ears are not only being battered by the wind, Sunitra is likely hearing the loud sound too. The wind has an almost tribal, powerful and unrestricted force; it beats her up easily, drumming in her ears at the same time.
- 'scoured out'** is used to describe the effect of the stream on its banks. Scouring or cleaning roughly takes great strength and power. As it scours, the water can completely strip something of dirt and filth.
- 'like the remains of a skeleton'** is the phrase used to describe the pebbles left bleached by the fierce action of the water. A skeleton is the remains of something dead left long after the flesh has peeled away. By saying that the stream only leaves 'dead' pebbles, scattered and mis-shapen, the great force of it is shown.

Precision and close analysis of the words is the key to success in this question. Candidates should avoid generalisations such as 'it creates an effect on the reader,' or 'this caused the reader to read on.' Comments about the depressing nature of the scenery as perceived by Sunitra did not attract marks unless accompanied by selected phrases and explanations to support them. Ideas beginning, 'This gives the impression that...' have to include how and why the impression is given or they will not progress the answer further.

There was some evidence that a small number of candidates had spent time counting the exact number of words in their response – this is not necessary and is unlikely to be a good use of their time. Guidance on the length of the response is offered to indicate the likely length required to address a task successfully. Responses that offer significantly less or attempt to write substantially more may well be self-penalising – either leaving insufficient opportunity to explore choices in detail or putting themselves under unnecessary time pressure and resulting in less precise and carefully focused explanation. Similarly, answers that chose to ignore the advice to offer four choices in each half were in danger of offering insufficient evidence of understanding and/or less targeted responses containing a number of less effective or even inappropriate choices, diluting the evidence that they understood how language was being used.

Images such as 'swollen stream' and 'each hailstone a tiny bullet' were often explained simply as: 'There was a lot of water in the stream,' and 'the hard bits of hail hurt her'. These ideas were on occasion successfully expanded, for example 'The stream was far bigger than usual, like when your leg is injured and swells up. This is an unpleasant image,' and 'She means it's like a war-zone with bullets flying and it's as if the weather is trying to kill her.' Care needs to be taken when making connections between choices however – there was some misunderstanding allied to the last example as: 'Blown up the funnel of the valley,' was thought by some candidates to be part of the battle.

In attempting to spot general techniques and name devices rather than respond to the specific examples in context, some answers missed opportunities to move beyond Band 4. Quality of analysis rather than feature spotting needs to be the emphasis.

### Advice to candidates on Question 2

- ensure that all your choices are relevant to the focus of the question and identified precisely using quotation marks
- take time to choose the best examples within each paragraph rather than listing possibilities
- when offering a phrase as a choice, discuss how each of the words within it is working
- do not write out the beginning and end of a long quotation with the key words missing from the middle
- try to explain both how and why a particular word or image might have been used
- treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list or give a general comment which applies to all of them
- avoid generalised, 'empty' comments, such as 'the writer uses lots of adjectives to describe...'
- if you are not sure about effects, offer a literal meaning, in context, for each of your choices
- do not just label choices, discuss them in some detail
- to explain effects, think of the connotations and associations of the word(s) being used
- leave time to re-read and add to your answer.

### Question 3

#### (a) Notes

**Summarise the advantages and disadvantages of building a home for yourself according to Passage B.**

**Write your answer using short notes. Write one point per line.**

**You do not need to use your own words.**

**Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer. [15]**

#### (b) Summary

**Now use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the advantages and disadvantages of building a home for yourself.**

**You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.**

**Your summary should include all 15 of your points in Question 3(a) and must be 200 to 250 words.**

**Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your answer.**

Many candidates had understood the need to identify just 15 points in **3(a)** and that points added after the 15 would not be credited unless replacing a crossed out answer earlier on. Selecting and identifying points meant that candidates had to read and plan their answers carefully both to avoid repetition and to organise their ideas sensibly. There was more than one way in which points could be logically grouped and these options were reflected in the mark scheme. There were a total of 19 potential points available from this one passage allowing generous leeway for candidates looking for 15.

**Question 3(b)** responses that did well had used their points from **3(a)** carefully – organising them purposefully and aiming for a concise, fluent prose response rather than relying on repeating points in the order or language of the passage. For some candidates, revisiting points in **3(a)** during the planning stages of **3(b)** in order to edit and refine ideas in this part of the question might well have resulted in clearer, more distinct points in **3(a)** and a more efficient and well-focused response in **3(b)**. The two parts of this question are designed to work together, to provide candidates with a clear structure for their response in **3(a)** and an opportunity to revisit points selected when working on **3(b)**.

To answer this question successfully, candidates needed to first identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question, listing them clearly – one per numbered line, in note form. Candidates are reminded that they are only credited with a maximum of one mark per line. Candidates are not required to use their own words in this part of the question, though better answers occasionally chose to do so for clarity.

There are no marks to be scored for writing in **3(a)**; however, checking responses for accuracy in content and grammar is clearly essential if candidates are to avoid the potential danger of negating points through careless slips. Candidates should pay particular attention, for example, to correct any spelling errors that might change meaning. Care needs to be taken too when selecting from the text to ensure that the idea remains accurate and clear out of context.

The majority of candidates offered answers to **Question 3(b)** within the guidelines for length and had written in continuous prose. There were fewer examples of the response written as a narrative or commentary. Precise selection of each point was the most difficult skill as passage B contains examples of the same point, requiring the candidates to focus on the central meaning without repeating it in a slightly different form. Each idea should be expressed concisely with limited explanation.

Most demonstrated at least some awareness of the appropriate style for a summary, though typically those who relied on working through the text chronologically often repeated the same idea more than once as they encountered examples of the same point. Reflecting on potential answers more carefully in **3(a)** would have helped a number of these candidates to group examples usefully together under one umbrella point and/or avoid such repetition of ideas.

The most successful summary responses re-order and re-group the relevant information from the passage, with a clear focus on the question. The best answers consider carefully both the content and organisation of their answer, writing in fluent sentences, within the prescribed length and using their own words as far as possible. They avoid writing introductory statements and making comments, and concentrate on giving a factual objective summary.

In a number of answers, the inclusion of irrelevant and/or repeated material diminished the focus and depressed the Writing mark.

#### **Advice to candidates on Question 3:**

- read the question carefully and underline the key words
- re-read the passage after reading the question, in order to identify precisely the content points required
- list relevant points clearly in as few words as possible
- read through your list of points in **3(a)** checking each is distinct and accurate
- plan the structure of your response in **3(b)** – for example organising and sequencing content logically
- write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- be careful to give only information that answers the question
- you can choose to use your own words in **3(a)** and must use your own words in **3(b)**
- do not add further numbered points in **3(a)** past the 15 required
- pay attention to the guidance for length in **3(b)**
- do not add detail or examples to the content of the passage
- avoid repetition of points.

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US)

**Paper 0524/04**  
**Coursework Portfolio**

## Key messages

In this component, candidates should aim to:

- reflect in their writing their original, personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them;
- choose assignments that challenge them to write at the highest standard of which they are capable;
- write independently of undue guidance from published materials or from teachers;
- demonstrate variety of style, use of language and genre in the three assignments;
- write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops and clarified by the appropriate use of commas and other punctuation;
- revise, edit and correct first drafts in their own handwriting;
- proof-read their work carefully, as marks may be deducted for typing errors.

## General comments

There was a significant increase in candidate entries for this component. Many Centres followed the advice given in the key messages, and teachers understood that coursework was an educational experience and an opportunity for candidates to develop their writing skills and to learn to express their own thoughts.

Many Centres provided excellent samples and their marks were accepted or in some cases increased. This general report identifies a number of weaknesses in other samples and suggests ways in which marks may be improved.

The best results were obtained when teachers provided assignments that were suited to their candidates and where the candidates were given some say in deciding what they wished to write about. It is not necessarily a good idea for all candidates in a set or even a Centre to attempt the same assignments, simply because they do not fit the abilities and interests of everyone who undertook them.

The best folders were from those who wrote with originality. Some stimulus material was, however, followed too closely, so that at least parts of the content and even the structure were provided for the candidates, so that it was very difficult to apply the marking criteria.

While it was often clear that candidates understood how to respond to the reading texts exactly as intended by the syllabus, there was also a frequent misunderstanding of how the reading assessment worked. Candidates were expected to select ideas and opinions from the reading text and to evaluate them. Guidance is given below as to what constitutes evaluation. Too often, the selection of ideas and opinions did not give enough opportunity to candidates to carry out an evaluation of the writer's views and attitudes, and there was a tendency to address the topic rather than the arguments.

The quality of the assessment varied, but many Centres over-marked candidates both for reading and for writing. Centres which used the whole range of the marks were generally more realistic than those who assessed in the narrow range in Bands 2 and 3, there being too few candidates placed in Band 4. The assessment of writing was often made according to content and structure and not enough account was taken of accuracy (SPAG) which had to be given equal weighting with content, structure and style.

Nevertheless, a good deal of hard work went into the completion of the folders which were well presented. Most of the administration by Centres was satisfactory and, in some cases, very usefully presented for the Moderator's use. Some Centres presented work of an exceptionally high standard and the effort put into the work by the candidates often resulted in high marks. It was noted that candidates working in the top bands were given challenging tasks, while some candidates were prevented from achieving their best through lack of challenge.

There were some examples of collusion and plagiarism which were identified by Moderators. These were sent to the Regulations team in Cambridge for further action. Centres are reminded that they must set and monitor the work so that it is not possible for this to occur.

### Good Practice

Some of the good practice has been outlined above, but the following list illustrates the features of the best of the work:

- The writing illustrated the candidate's own views and feelings.
- It demonstrated originality of thought and was not dependent on information and ideas from websites.
- Argument was progressively structured with well-sequenced sentences within paragraphs.
- The folders illustrated the ability to write in three different styles to fit three different genres.
- There was an enthusiasm in the writing that was communicated to the reader.
- Care was taken to eliminate errors, including accidental ones, when word-processing.
- Candidates understood punctuation, particularly the use of full stops and semi colons.

### Areas for improvement

- Tasks that offer sufficient challenge to achieve the targeted mark bands.
- Use of secure structure with appropriate paragraph order that does not rely on lists or repetition.
- Awareness of the range and choice of language.
- Appropriate use of drafts to develop work by editing, revising and correcting.
- Assignments that are suited to this component, and avoid long, controlled conditions assessments.

### Task setting

In general, task setting was appropriate and there were few examples where the task did not meet the requirements of the syllabus. Some Centres set assignments where the genre of Assignment 1 was too similar to that of Assignment 2. This was usually where two accounts of different events were offered in a similar style. There were also Assignment 1 tasks which were responses to a text, very similar to the requirements of the third assignment.

Many tasks offered a satisfactory level of challenge, but there were some that were only suitable for candidates at Bands 3 and 4. The best tasks were those that appealed to candidates' senses of imagination and adventure. Some of these are listed later in this report.

### Assessment of coursework

#### Writing

Most Centres provided a reliable rank order and many marked accurately. Centres should take care to reward assurance in style and a high degree of accuracy. Moderators saw a number of Centres where the standard of literacy was so high that accuracy was complete or almost so across all three assignments.

On the other hand a significant number of Centres marked leniently as insufficient weighting was given to accuracy, particularly punctuation, or where the range of language and sentence structure was not sufficiently wide.

Centres are asked to be sure to annotate errors in writing in the final draft. It was not always clear that missing full stops, apostrophes and the wrong use of semi colons had been noticed when assessing writing. Some comments made at the end of an inaccurate piece of work suggested that there were no errors. Some pieces of writing had been assessed on the basis of their content and little or no weighting had been given to accuracy or to style.

The commonest error was that of the missing full stop. Simple sentences were wrongly punctuated with commas. Commas were often not used in more complex sentences to show the division between clauses. One of the most serious errors was the inappropriate use of the semi colon and colon. Some candidates placed semi colons in the middle of sentences where there should be no break at all. Colons were commonly used to preface short lists of single words where commas were more appropriate. There was no reason why candidates who did not use semi colons or colons at all should not be placed in Band 1. Moderators recommend that candidates should firstly be made secure in their use of full stops and commas.

Many candidates who scored high marks for writing were immediately recognisable for the assurance with which they used language and sentence structures. Candidates in Band 2 typically wrote complex sentences to communicate meaning and to vary their construction and length for effect. Those working at Band 2 and particularly at Band 1 used a wide range of appropriate language to communicate detail and shades of meaning. However, there were many examples where the range of language was quite limited or where language was used awkwardly. This was particularly so with imagery, where it was very common to find simple images relating to animals that did not give any additional meaning or interest. Where the language was repetitive and straightforward it was typical of a low Band 3 or of Band 4.

The mark for writing was sometimes affected where an assignment had been set that did not give sufficient challenge to candidates.

### **Assessment of reading**

Most candidates understood how to respond to their text correctly. They made a sensible selection of ideas and opinions from the text. These ideas and opinions illustrated the writer's message and attitudes and were ones that could be explored and evaluated. Differentiation was achieved by the quality of the comments made in responding to these ideas and opinions. In order to access Band 2, candidates had to evaluate the items they had chosen. To evaluate they identified fact from opinion, explored the writer's inconsistencies and explained bias. The best candidates provided a convincing overview of the text and integrated their selected ideas and opinions in a structured response. This was worth a mark in Band 1. Candidates who summarised the text did not score above 6 marks.

Some candidates made a satisfactory selection of ideas and opinions but provided very limited responses, for example doing little more than to agree or disagree with the writer. They did not apply their reasoning to the writer's attitudes. Some texts were also quite weak and did not give enough for candidates to engage with fully. This is also dealt with below.

An increasing number of candidates responded by writing about the topic rather than the views expressed in the text. This often provided a decent writing mark, since the response was frequently well structured, but was not sufficient for a reading mark above Band 3.

### **Administration by Centres**

#### **Summary of the contents of the folder**

1. The folders required from each Centre by CIE
2. In addition, the top and bottom folder in the Centre's mark range
3. The CASFs (WMS) for all the candidates in the Centre with changes to marks made at internal moderation.
4. The Moderator's copy of the MS1 or electronically submitted mark list.
5. An early draft (see below) of one of the assignments
6. A copy of the article used for Assignment 3, preferably with the candidate's annotations.

Most of the administration was excellent, although not all Centres provided the top and bottom folder in their range.

Some Centres only provided the CASF (WMS) for the sample. This was required for all candidates as it had to be checked against the MS1. A number of errors in transferring the marks were discovered. The CASF

showed the definitive mark awarded by the Centre and give the breakdown of the marks and any marks made at internal moderation.

Internal Moderation was often carried out very thoroughly and effectively by Centres. Some, however, appeared only to have internally moderated a small number of their candidates, and this was apparent when the sample was moderated. Moderators often had to look at the folders to find the results of internal moderation because the new marks had not been entered on the CASF.

There were a few cases where the article used for Assignment 3 was not supplied.

### **Annotation**

Some Centres clearly annotated errors on the final assignments but many did not. Centres are asked to annotate errors because they have to be assessed along with the content, structure and style.

Annotation in the margin where objectives had been achieved was sometimes unreliable because such achievements were not necessarily sustained. It was much better to assess the different objectives at the end of the work to show which were typical of the whole assignment.

Some work was carefully assessed on forms invented by the Centre, but some pieces of work bore no indication that they had been read or assessed.

### **Drafts**

Only one early draft was required and it was generally understood that it was not allowed for a teacher to indicate individual errors on the draft. Teachers were asked to write their comments of a general nature at the end of the work and not in the margin or in the body of the work. There were few Centres where the habit of correcting was general throughout the department, but there were individual teachers who did not understand the rule. Heads of Department are asked to make this clear to all staff and to check the work.

There were few Centres where candidates had worked on their drafts, often with excellent results. Those who did edit by adding, deleting and changing words and phrases, revised by re-ordering sections, especially endings and beginnings (or adding extra detail) and, of course, corrected their errors. They did this by using their own handwriting and different colours where appropriate. This was excellent practice and one of the reasons why a draft is included in the folder.

Some first drafts were short forms of what would become the final response and usefully showed teachers the beginning of the work and the course of the argument. The teacher was able to advise which areas were worth exploring and extending. This was a proper use of drafting.

Many first drafts were the same word-for-word as the final version and no work had been done to improve them by the candidates.

### **Authenticity**

The work of most candidates was clearly original, often clearly so because of the inclusion of personal views and feelings. However, some of the assignments were written in such a different style from the rest of the work that it prompted Moderators to trace the material to the internet. This was a serious matter and Centres are reminded that candidates cannot copy work from a source that is not their own.

Work is not considered authentic where too much help had been given to candidates. This included giving writing frames, telling candidates what to write and providing a stimulus and asking candidates to write their own version. It is very difficult to carry out a realistic assessment of content (which was not strictly original) and structure (which followed someone else's pattern). Teachers are again reminded that coursework demands that all work should be original. It is in order to use a stimulus, but the stimulus must not become a template.

### **Assignment 1**

The best, and most common, responses were made to single issues and were clearly personal to the candidate. Sometimes, this quality of being personal was best achieved by presenting the issue as the words of a speech, but there were many successful forms, for example a letter to a head teacher advocating a shorter school day.

The three standard topics of the death penalty, euthanasia and abortion were occasionally done well but generally lacked energy and originality. Here are six topics that were done well by individual candidates, of whom wrote with conviction and some imagination:

*Political correctness*  
*Banksy – jerk or just a clever marketeer?*  
*Are parents too controlling?*  
*Women in the media*  
*Valentine's Day*  
*The band that I helped to form (on the occasion of its first gig)*

Several Centres continued to rely on *Do not get me started on...*. This was not generally a challenging assignment, although one candidate wrote a connected and persuasive piece on the National Health Service. The problem with it lay in its nature as a rant. Topics were rarely sufficient to produce a convincing argument and some of them were familiar internet themes such as slow walkers, chavs and creepy crawlies. Candidates rarely had much to say and their work was sometimes repetitive. They also frequently confused formal and informal language. Hence in terms of content, structure and style there were often weaknesses, and as a task it was generally suitable for candidates expected to score Band 3 or Band 4.

There were also a number of reviews both of restaurants and of films. The film reviews were sometimes very similar to ones on the internet and also tended to devote too much space to retelling the story. Stylistically, there was a tendency to copy the style used by film reviewers. The restaurant reviews were better when they were based on what was clearly an actual visit to a restaurant rather than a piece of objective writing in media style.

## Assignment 2

Some of the writing for this assignment was particularly good. An appealing title was essential and it was surprising that some candidates did not give a name to their work. The fiction was probably the best, especially where there was a convincing twist at the end, a turning point, or devices such as two narrators or time lapses. This added interest to the narrative and indicated that the writer was in control.

It was not necessary for a narrative to consist of gratuitous violence. The narratives based on *Saving Private Ryan* were not particularly original and made unpleasant, unengaging reading.

Another assignment set was based on *Out of the Blue*. This has now been used for a number of years and although some candidates recreated the horror well, others wrote unconvincing narratives.

There were many First World War stories, diaries and letters, some of which were very moving, including a set of letters culminating in the last before the death of the writer. Others were too concerned with blood and war wounds to be very appropriate.

Some care should be taken in deciding on the content of stories. The following titles were in themselves engaging to the reader and suggested some imaginative responses:

*It's elementary, Mr Detective*  
*Point of no return*  
*Whistles of the wind*  
*Land of the lost*  
*Red does not go with blue*  
*The yellow palm*  
*The launching*  
*The house of eyes*

Many responses were in the form of monologues which are difficult to sustain. Many started well but ran out of content because they only covered a state of mind that was often too static. They needed a structure, and the fact that they were spoken sometimes inhibited the use of a wide range of language. Those that included at least some short-lived events were the most successful, but they were rarely as effective as fiction.



There were few examples of personal writing apart from travels to other countries (which were often versions of *The worst/best day of my life*). Those who wrote autobiographical fragments generally did so with conviction and honesty and their accounts were original.

There were also a large number of descriptions, particularly of *The beach*, *The theme park*, and *A walk through the woods*. Better descriptions used a change of viewpoint or time passing and avoided repetitive lists. So a piece described at morning, noon and night, or the approach and passing of a cycle race, or an eclipse would produce some interesting work. Where descriptions were not static but progressive, the writing worked well.

Good topics were:

*Underwater*

*On the moon*

*Afternoon in the favela*

*The little giant (a tornado)*

*Making my teacher cry*

### Assignment 3

Texts where candidates could disagree with the writer's attitude, where the writer was writing from one viewpoint without thinking of other people's opinions, worked well. So, in the following topics, it was easy to find arguments that were inconsistent and biased:

*Katie Hopkins' views on how to control who plays with her children*

*Children ruin Christmas*

*Re-introduction of National Service*

*Voting for sixteen-year-olds*

*Teenagers are the dumbest generation*

*Should girls play with Barbie?*

*The ban on Saudi women driving*

Some texts did not give candidates opportunities to select appropriate ideas and opinions. Centres should avoid texts where the issue was one that no one could disagree with, texts where most of the writing was reportage and narrative and repetitive texts taken from the internet, badly ordered with a shortage of argument. Texts had to contain sufficient ideas and opinions with which candidates could engage.

Some of the best choices were from articles written by Jeremy Clarkson. Most of these articles started with some opinions intended to shock, but later on, contained some ideas that were worth considering even if the reader did not agree. The articles differentiated well because better candidates understood the different layers of argument while less able candidates could only appreciate what was literally on the page.

There were several texts that were used by many Centres. These were not necessarily successful, and candidates who used them sometimes scored fewer marks. They included the following:

*Educating Essex*: this text has been used for several examination series and has very weak arguments.

*I see a killer die*: this is not a pleasant piece to give candidates, and it is mostly reportage so there are very few ideas or opinions to be selected and very little to evaluate.

*The death penalty article by 'Flamehorse'*: this was not a bad piece of argument, although not many candidates took issue with it successfully. The fact that it had headings that worked as a writing frame did not help candidates who tended to use the headings in lieu of ideas and opinions they had found for themselves.

It was frustrating for Moderators to see the same texts used so frequently when with some imagination and ingenuity a wider range of original writing could have been discovered.