



GENERAL COMMENTS

The English examination assessed student achievement in the skills and outcomes indicated in the *English VCE Study Design*.

The examination consisted of two sections. The first section (Text response) had two parts and students were required to complete one response from each part. The second section (Writing task) also had two parts. The first part concerned the analysis of language use, while in the second part students were required to complete one piece of writing in response to a choice of three different options in form and purpose.

Assessment was based upon criteria and was applied holistically. Scores were awarded that reflected the assessors' judgement of the **whole** answer and students were ranked over the full range of available marks. The descriptors of the 'Expected Qualities for the Mark Range – EXAMINATION' can be found on the VCAA website by following the link to Exam Criteria from the English Study Page. These descriptors are based on the criteria and are general indicators of what might reasonably be expected for the specified mark ranges in each section of the examination. Specificity and fine judgements are then possible when the exact characteristics of responses for any one year are analysed.

Students performed capably in this examination and the paper seemed to be handled quite well. Students tended to write more and there was no reported evidence of time being a real constraint on students' responses. The quality and quantity of work produced in what is an ostensibly tight time frame was impressive. There were very few incomplete answers, and solid to strong student responses seemed to be in greater abundance than in 2004. Assessors also noted that students generally displayed a better command of answer structure and many gave indications of a strong core knowledge in their answers.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that:

- there was a disturbing and growing dependence on formulaic responses, which suggests that some students believe that rote or second-hand learning is sufficient. This is not the case. The study of English is concerned with developing students' understanding and control of the English language* for competent use in a full range of personal and public situations. Active engagement with texts enables students to develop language awareness, to articulate ideas, and to develop communication skills. The English curriculum aims to address these skills as they pertain to life experiences. Clearly, a personal engagement with the texts and ideas is neither formulaic nor predictable
- some students did not fully engage with the actual elements of the questions. Greater care needs to be taken in analysing and recognising the specific expectations of the questions set – often this comes down to a precise understanding of the actual words which comprise the task
- better responses used language accurately. It is as simple as that. Students were awarded marks if they used language well.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The student responses provided below are presented for illustrative and informative reasons, and they may form the basis of profitable discussions. These examples should not be taken as 'the best' that is possible or as 'perfect'; indeed none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. However, they are typical of the range expected from students who are working under examination conditions to produce a first draft piece of writing. Readers will obviously be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the brief comments offered herein.

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or content.

Section 1 – Text response

Part 1

For Part 1, the most popular texts and their mean scores, out of a possible 10 marks, were as follows:

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Gattaca</i>	21.98	5.40
<i>The Wife of Martin Guerre</i>	8.71	5.83
<i>King Oedipus</i>	7.40	5.80
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>	6.59	5.26

The least popular texts for this part included *The Stories of Tobias Wolff*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Plague* and *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*.



The highest mean score for both parts was again achieved by students who wrote on *Tess of The D'Urbervilles*.

Part 1 of the Text response section assessed students' ability to develop a 'sustained interpretive point of view about a text'. This part was generally very well done. Students' knowledge of the texts and grasp of textual detail was sound, and they generally seemed to be confident about the required analytical mode of approach. As a whole, students wrote equally well across most of the genres, although the collections of stories/poems provided additional challenges in regards to linking, focus and synthesis. These skills need to be mastered before the examination, not experimented with during the actual examination.

Single element questions such as that on *King Oedipus* were generally better handled than those with composite elements, such as the questions on *The Plague* and *Breaker Morant*. In this latter example, many students appeared not to have seen the phrase 'viewers are challenged', which gave the opportunity to talk about genre impact and power.

Questions with inherent tensions also need continuing work. Examples of these included 'atrocities' versus 'goodness' (*First They Killed My Father*) and 'vulnerability' versus 'strength' (*Gattaca*). Likewise, questions proposing particular notions such as 'human frailty' or 'fundamentally decent' (both from *A View From The Bridge*) invite a thorough consideration and/or 'weighing up' of the various parts of the proposition.

The questions on the examination are carefully phrased to offer a broad range of possible answers, and students should study all questions closely before deciding which to answer. The questions should be seen as invitations to discuss, not triggers for unleashing a formula. Students should not automatically accept the premise of a topic at face value; sometimes challenging the statement is the best strategy. Surprisingly few students challenged the label 'helpless' in the question on *Girl With A Pearl Earring*, but those who did generally provided a deep, reflective discussion. They were able to display some brilliant insights into Griet's quite complex character.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers; rather, informed authenticity in writing should be encouraged at every opportunity. Solid preparation that takes account of the views of others, but which is finally personal and thorough, is the ideal path to follow.

Students are expected to have mastered the technical issues intrinsic to the genre. Structural elements are clearly critical to the workings of a text, but an understanding of the whole as well as those parts is essential. While collections of smaller works offer the challenge of variation in focus, they can also offer the opportunity for deep reflection and real structural expertise in writing.

The following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

'Because the story is narrated from Christopher's point of view, we learn little about other characters.'

Do you agree?

'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime' is all about perspective. Although Mark Haddon does not specifically relate to readers that Christopher, the main protagonist and narrator of the text suffers from Asperger's Syndrome, the text explores how the fifteen-year-old teenager views the people and events which surround him. Taking this disability into account and as readers explore the text, readers realise that the unreliable narration of the first-person perspective is made even more skewed because of how differently Christopher views things, so much so that even learning about the true nature and motivations of his father Ed and mother Judy's actions are threatened. However, this is not quite the case, seeing that more discerning readers are able to interpret the matters of the heart and mind more easily than Christopher.

Christopher's perception and view on people and events in life becomes somewhat limited simply because he suffers from Asperger's Syndrome. Whilst viewing the world in which Christopher learns to adapt to from one person's perspective, that is, Christopher's, is questionable, the narration tends to become even more unreliable because he does what he calls and accuses others of doing 'glancing'. Christopher accuses others of not really seeing something that is there and seems to relish in the certainty of the knowledge in which he has set for himself that just like his role model 'Sherlock Holmes', who is able to 'detach his mind at will' from the events before him, he also can 'detach his mind' at will in order to stay detached and to stop the 'hurting inside (his) head'. However, from the reader's perspective, Christopher is in fact 'just being observant' and being the more discerning viewers, readers are able to distinguish the deception, motivations and intentions of other characters far beyond what Christopher thinks he is capable of.

It is mid-way through the text that readers find out, with Christopher, that his father Ed Boone has killed the dog Wellington. From Christopher's eyes, his father has lied to him by not telling him of this deed, in which case, Christopher interprets as his father not loving him because to Christopher, 'loving someone is telling them the truth.' Secondly, Christopher relates best to dogs: 'I like dogs very much' because both are somewhat similar in that they have four distinct moods of 'happy, sad, cross and concentrating'. Finding out his father has just killed something that Christopher prizes without doubt shakes all that he is ever taught to know. Readers, on the other hand can understand that it is out of the frustration and desperation of being expected to maintain the responsibility of looking



after a child with 'Behavioural Problems' that has perhaps driven Ed to kill the dog, in conjunction with losing a wife and thus feeling isolated and all alone.

Readers also fall upon the knowledge, as with Christopher, that Ed has been secretly hiding his mother Judy's letter from him and has led Christopher to believe that she is dead. Once again, Christopher perceives this on face-value and his first reaction is that his father does not love him and could very well hurt him like he did Wellington the dog. Understandably, Christopher's survival instincts motivate him to hide, run away from his father in order to feel 'safe' as he does behind logic and reason found in maths. Readers, however, learn that Ed might have hidden the truth about his mother to perhaps protect Christopher from anything associated with Judy: that is, hurt, rejection and perhaps cowardice from responsibility. Alternatively, Ed must have just been doing this to spite Judy, to return some form of vengeance by disallowing her from any form of contact with her own son. Ed's motivations behind his actions, of course, are up to the outsider's interpretation.

Around the same time as the unmasking of Ed's deception towards Christopher, readers also realise that Judy has abandoned both Ed and Christopher and run away with another man, Mr Shears. It is interesting to note that instead of blaming or accusing his mother as readers would be more inclined to do, Christopher moves on to overcome his seemingly innate desire for structure, 'rhythm' and for everything to be in a 'nice order' to search for his mother by taking a train to London all by himself. Readers, on the contrary, recognise that Judy's escape with Mr Shears would have been rooted from the fear, trepidation and frustration associated with the pressures and expectations of bringing up a child suffering from a disability like Asperger's. Readers can also interpret that both Mr Shears and Judy may have recognised in each other the common shared longing for release and escape from their marriages and thus, the followed action of abandoning all they knew to start a new life, however better or improved is left somewhat questionable.

Despite the text been written from a first person narrative as well as from the rather distorted and limited perception of Christopher, a victim of Asperger's Syndrome, more open-minded readers are able to discern and very often interpret the deeper meaning to the events in the text and have the capacity to recognise the motivations, deception and purpose behind each character's actions.

Assessor comments

- The student readily and assuredly focuses on the topic and appreciates the way in which first-person narrative is so powerful an influence on the reader.
- Throughout the essay, the student skilfully weaves in pertinent, yet not excessive, textual quotations.
- Each topic sentence builds on the student's emerging case in a coherent and structured manner.
- A sophisticated and perceptive response. Occasional awkwardness in expression is apparent, but knowledge of the text informs a response that 'works with the topic' and shows insight.
- The student reveals a genuine capacity to think and analyse the text, from the perspective and framework set by the topic.

The following is an example of medium-scoring student response.

Girl with a Pearl Earring

"Thank you for reminding me of how helpless I am, '..."

Does the text show Griet to be helpless?

In 17th century Delft women were restricted and were considered low members of society. Chevalier's Girl With A Pearl Earring traces Griet a young women with a weak social class who had little choice over her life which made her helpless and vulnerable.

In a time when women had no say in occupation, had little education and were forced to obey their fathers Griet a young woman was born into a protestant household which was a low social class. Protestant women in 17th century were expected to fulfil duties within the home whilst the father was expected to support the family economically. Griet's life wasn't ruled by riches or fashions and she was helpless to choosing a pathway in her life. She was a respectable woman who had a secret desire to move up in the world however due to her weak social class in society and her obligations toward her family her low beginnings made her helpless and vulnerable to choice. She was of working class background. Whether it be 'chopping vegetables for her mother so the colours don't fight' or helping fulfil expectations for her family, she had little choice in life to decide her occupation or her education. Due to the unfortunate situation of her father being blinded in a kiln explosion 'taking his eyes and his trade' Griet is left helpless and vulnerable and she is forced with little control out of 'the familiarity of home'. She has 'no choice' and is helpless.

As she walks past 'every red brick house and green waterway' she is made to work for the painter, Vermeer. She is defenceless and she is considered weak due to her social class. She is considered weak to her social class. She is an outsider in Vermeer household. As she gains confidence however she is absorbed into the artistic world of her master. She has little control over the tasks he makes her do. She becomes helpless and forced to assist him even though this is against her faith. He forces her to part her lips which she thought was suggestive and seductive but she had no say as a woman with her station. She confesses 'I begged him not to ruin me' and she recognises she has little control over her situation.

She is forced to uncover her hair 'I was not the type of woman who uncovered her hair.'

When Pieter reminds her 'theirs is not your world, you have little control over what happens to you surely you can see that', she could see how helpless she was but she was weak and insignificant and this made her trapped.

Van Ruijven takes advantage of 'the new maid' he ogles and gropes her because he holds power. She was unable to act without help or guidance 'don't fight me girl, you'll enjoy it more if you don't fight'.



Due to Griet's weak station in society she was helpless to the choices in life. She was forced to do tasks she was uncomfortable doing and became trapped between two men who held the upper hand. She could never be in control over the obstacles that were in her life and she became absorbed into the world of artistic Vermeer knowing she couldn't escape.

Assessor comments

- In a very limited and superficial manner, the student initially tries to touch upon the topic.
- Some sense of the text and its context is shown, but the student is unable to control this or demonstrate the depth of analysis required.
- While this is quite a lengthy response, there is a serious lack of knowledge about the text or control of ideas, which renders it most uneven.
- Needless and irrelevant detail and information cloud the ideas and the development of a sustained or connected response.
- Although the student continually seeks to return to the notion of 'helplessness', he/she is unconvincing in developing a really sustained or unified essay.

The following is an example of low-scoring student response.

Stolen

'Although the characters in Stolen try to control their lives, the play shows that it is inevitable that they will fail to achieve that control.'

Discuss.

In Jane Harrison's play stolen, the 5 Aboriginal characters are subjected to the stolen generation enforced by government. Throughout the play the characters try to obtain, create and have ability to play out their lives, the way then want to. But in the end they do not succeed.

Jimmy is the best example of this inability to strive for freedom of his life. In the early scenes of Jimmy as a child, showing him doing what he wants, whenever he wants with no respect to authoritative figures or anyone else. This reflects the freedom and control Jimmy has to an extent that he is running his life.

Not until Jimmy is arrested and imprisoned for assault has there been any inductive reason why he's not living his life the way he wants. From here on Jimmy loses the struggle to keep control of his life and slowly descends into madness. The result of him failing to keep fighting for his life, is realised when he hangs himself in his cell.

Ruby's unable to avoid failure in controlling her life, due to her being detained in Cranby children's home. In the line-up scenes, she has no power of when or by who will select her, in the end a white couple select her. This is when we realise that Ruby can't do anything but go with the family. It's here where Ruby is subjected to sexual & physical abuse which affects her mental state as well. In the end she is silence and told not tell by receiving presents.

However, Shirley is a character in which loses the control of her life when the 2 kids Kate & Lionel are taken away by the welfare. This is shown through quotes 'the big black car' and 'their faces are small, so small'. Later on in the play Shirley finds her sense of control when she is united with Kate.

As you can see characters in Stolen fail to achieve the control they want of their lives, but for some such as Shirley it's not all lost.

Assessor comments

- The student shows no real grasp of the core of this topic, 'inevitability of failure', preferring to simply list aspects about characters in a succession of separate and disparate paragraphs.
- The entire essay is far too slight and insubstantial.
- Vague commentary abounds rather than depth and true textual analysis.
- There is a lack of overall organisation.
- The essay is expressed in an offhand and 'cavalier' manner.

Part 2

For Part 2, the most popular texts and their mean scores, out of a possible 10 marks, were as follows:

Text	% of students	Average mark
<i>Gattaca</i>	27.99	5.73
<i>Stolen</i>	6.82	5.33
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>	6.30	4.83
<i>Breaker Morant</i>	5.52	5.64

The least popular texts for this part included *The Stories of Tobias Wolff*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* and *No Great Mischief*.



Part 2 of the Text response section enables students to draw on their experience and their developing life views as they work with the ideas and values in the text. Students need to thoroughly understand what a text is doing and how it works (Part 1 understandings) in order to do well in their Part 2 response. Part 2 offers the opportunity to work with the text and its wider social, political and historical contexts. This is the raw material which will likely have some part in creating students' own views and awareness as they go on in life; it is the material which they will remember for life. Study of the ideas in texts enables students to draw on their experience and assists them in formulating their positions in relation to the world of ideas. It works with and canvasses responses to conceptual, reflective notions which the texts deal with at their core. The best answers were superlative pieces of writing that highlighted students' maturity and ability as they responded to the texts and topics by formulating their own positions in relation to the world of ideas. Most students were able to tackle the basic propositions of the questions to some degree.

Students should take note of the following points in responding to Part 2 questions.

- Prepared answers do not work. Students must respond to the particular values and ideas peculiar to the question before them. The **skills** needed to do this must be the focus of their learning.
- The topics themselves are complex and multi-stranded, therefore teachers must ensure that sufficient space is set aside in class for reflective discussion. This may even require more time than specific textual discussions. The focus should be on the underlying cultural and social values and their pertinence to the text. Literature grows out of particular cultures and their underlying values.
- Better responses developed a conceptual argument as a framework of the answer and then applied this argument to the text, discussing details of the text in relation to the conceptual ideas.
- Students should be reminded that the assessors know the texts, therefore plot summaries are not needed and are of no use.

The following is an example of high-scoring student response.

Gattaca

'Gattaca demonstrates that it is better for a society to value the imperfect individual than to seek genetic excellence.'

Discuss.

In Gattaca, directed by Andrew Niccol, Niccol opens the debate on whether we should tamper with 'Mother nature' or leave well alone 'What God hath made crooked.' He contends that the ability to eliminate serious diseases and negative social disorders is a good thing, however that also the world of Gattaca takes eugenics too far in its quest to reach perfection, eliminating every imperfection from mankind.

Perfection is strived for but destruction is the result. Thus, 'Gattaca' shows that it is better for society to value the imperfect individual than to seek genetic excellence. Technology and science advancement changed society's beliefs. The ideal goal is to reach perfection through genetic excellence. This ideal of perfection is of faultlessness, flawlessness, completeness and is of ultimately reaching the optimum level of life. 'Gattaca' shows us that through valuing genetic excellence, a calamitous environment was created affecting the human being on so many different levels.

Striving for a perfect society through genetic excellence means creating that perfection based on only one belief. Technology advancement and science has meant that the role of eugenics in the world of Gattaca has become more and more expected in everyday life. There are some positives to tampering with ones DNA such as ridding the world of serious diseases, however 'Gattaca' shows us that the negatives by far outweigh the positives.

Individuality as well as uniqueness is lost in the population. This is shown through the example of writing with your right hand. Writing with your right hand was considered to be better than writing with your left, and so the purported gene that determines what hand you write with was ultimately changed to suit society's beliefs. 'Gattaca' also shows a loss of individuality through the setting and layout of the workplace in Gattaca. It shows a sterile internal and external view where workers are to work in a '1950's typing pool' styled layout with immaculate uniforms and appearance.

Dreams are needed for purpose in life, but Gattaca's belief in genetic excellence deprives people in society of the ability to dream. No one questions the belief of reaching perfection as everyone believes it and so they do not question themselves. This is shown through Irene's words 'It's not possible.' Irene was told at birth that she has a delicate heart. She knows that she cannot travel to Titan as she is told that it is impossible for her to achieve such a thing with her condition. Irene also limits the men she pursues because she believes that the Alpha 9.3 male is too good for her and will not be interested.

'Valid' – the term used for people who have had their DNA genetically engineered; who are perfect do not dream. This is because they are told that they can achieve anything they want to. However, without the challenge, there is no motivation, and so they just let life pass them by. An example of this is Anton. Anton is self-assured and so holds no aspirations in life; 'I bet I could be an astronaut if I wanted.' Due to lack of motivation Anton becomes a 'flatfoot' policeman.

Through achieving genetic excellence there is no challenge in life and so dreams are unheard of. Without dreams this results in a boring, colourless society, as because there is no excitement when you achieve something, or no disappointment or anger when you fail to achieve something, there is no passion life. Those who do not dream remain disappointed throughout their lives and do not live life fully and passionately. It is therefore shown that the imperfect individual is better than the perfect individual moulded into genetic excellence.



Seeking genetic excellence can be physically destructive. Invasive procedures are to be endured day after day. This constant monitoring to make sure you are who you are who say you are, puts stress on those monitored physically. This is shown at the entrance to Gattaca where in order for workers to enter their workplace, they must have their finger pricked in order to draw blood for testing. Urine samples and fitness heart monitoring tests are also carried out in a normal workday.

The burden of perfection also lies on those who do not achieve what was guaranteed at birth. Those who are valid and are promised achievement fail to understand why they are not the best, why they are not what they were promised, when they don't achieve something. For example Jerome/Eugene cannot understand his failure as a swimmer as 'Jerome Morrow wasn't supposed to be one step down on the podium.' He attempts to commit suicide in order to cope with his failure.

A rigid classed society is developed where discrimination separates those who are 'perfect' (valids) from those who are 'imperfect'. This is shown through the words of Jerome/Eugene to Jerome/Vincent; 'They will never believe that one of their elite has suckered them all this time...when they look at you, they don't see you anymore, they only see me.' Discrimination is also shown through the fact that Jerome/Vincent is classed as an invalid. Invalids are told that they cannot succeed to the standard of valids. Jerome/Vincent's father remarks to Jerome/Vincent 'Let's be realistic...the only way you would see the inside of a spaceship is if you were cleaning it.' The murder investigation also demonstrates the development of this rigid classed society. It is taken into account as serious, as it should be, but not in the right respect that would otherwise be assumed. The investigators see it as an opportunity to blame an invalid, as straight away the idea of an invalid working as a imposter comes to the minds of those investigating. Particularly, the brutality of this discrimination is shown outside the Cavendish Club where an individual is brutally attacked and beaten because he has no information to offer on the crime.

Social interaction is deprived of its qualities as love and compassion are lost. The natural way of meeting and getting to know someone is made a thing of the past, while falling in love with someone through love of their personality is also overlooked. In the world of Gattaca, it is as simple as going up to a window and handing in someone's DNA to get it checked in order to see if their profile matches yours.

It is shown that Gattaca's belief of reaching genetic excellence impacts negatively on the human being in many ways, as well as society. The imperfect individual should therefore be more valued as life is valid in equality, and is lived passionately. Without passion and emotions mankind cannot live consciously and instead lives in a world unconscious of what life is really about.

Assessor comments

- From the outset, the student reveals a deft and assured means of responding to the topic, interweaving textual analysis with measured conceptual thinking.
- A confident and assured approach is used. Although there are slips and imperfections at times, they do not detract from the clarity of the argument.
- Rather than sitting in isolation, the rich and careful use of text is always linked to the overall argument.
- The entire essay is conceptually sharp, which is the hallmark of a high calibre response.
- This is an extensive and expansive response, which reveals that the student appreciates the complexity of ideas and the ways in which these are explored in the film.

The following is an example of medium-scoring student response.

Gattaca

'Gattaca demonstrates that it is better for a society to value the imperfect individual than to seek genetic excellence.'

Discuss.

Andrew Niccol's Gattaca portrays the society as a discriminatory environment where social status is determined by the quality of a persons genome. The protagonist Vincent Freeman rebels against these ideals and is represented as an individual who values the qualities not determined by a person's genes.

Niccol shows the Gattaca Corporation early on as a society where everyone acts the same in thier sterile environment. Crisp suits and orderly, bland behaviour shows a world where no creativity or individuality is seen. The 'not too distant future' is shown to be a place where a person's 'true resume is in their genes' and warns us of the possible environment we could create for ourselves. Niccol demonstrates the 'genetically excellent' individuals as having no aspiration or drive because 'success is usually guarenteed from birth.' This is seen through Jerome Morrow, a disabled genetic 'perfection'.

The relationship between Vincent and Jerome is used to shows the audience the great difference between their two personalities. We first see Jerome as a sad, alcoholic and reduced individual who is bitter and cynical, asserting 'Jerome Morrow was never meant to be one step down on the Podium'. In contrast Vincent is depicted as a confident, determined individual who will do anything to achieve his dream. In this way the 'imperfect individual is seen as the positive and more appealing figure. Jerome seems to represent the worst side of genetic engineering and the failure it may bring.

Niccol uses Vincent to challenge the society in another way. After attending a piano concert with Irene, he is surprised to discover the pianist has twelve fingers. Irene's statement 'that piece can only be played with twelve' seems to annoy Vincent, and he replies 'twelve fingers or one its how you play.' The pianist represents the excessive lengths humanity will go to to obtain success. Though not physically perfect, the pianist has achieved fame for being genetically engineered, and puts other 'normal' players in the shadows.

The use of a 1950s style of clothing and cars seems to emphasise the lack of creativity seen in the Gattaca society. This retro look also emphasises the film noir techniques used. The detectives are seen to be dark officers who use the evidence of an invalid hair as an



almost certain suspect. The discrimination against Vincent is seen to be, in the end, a dead end and further emphasises the unfair accusations made against Invalids. It is the broad minded style of detective work done by the older detective which eventually solves the crime and further emphasises the importance of individual thinking and acceptance of 'lower class' citizens.

Niccol also uses the Lab Technician Lamar as an example of the problems with genetic manipulation. Lamar tells Vincent, referring to his 'detective' son 'he is not all they promised'. Lamar, a valid himself, begins to understand the problems with the society they live in and says 'you are a great inspiration to him.' showing that, despite Lamar's knowledge of his dectet, he still values him as a member of society.

The film Gattaca shows the audience a society where genetic imperfection leads to poor, squalid living. By showing Vincent as a man who defeats the system yet retains his individuality, Niccol is showing the importance of determination by Vincent and the acceptance of 'imperfect' individuals. As it is stated, 'There is no gene for the human spirit.'

Assessor comments

- This is limited as a Part 2 essay because it does not grapple with the conceptual problem of 'seeking genetic excellence' versus 'valuing individuals'.
- Initially, the student tries to establish a means of responding to the topic, but it is too limited and lacking in scope.
- A strong sense of the text as a film is revealed, which is advantageous to the way in which the student seeks to tackle the topic.
- An unevenness is seen in the way in which textual knowledge is used, including a degree of listing.
- The essay finishes with a disappointingly rushed conclusion.

The following is an example of low-scoring student response.

Girl with a Pearl Earring

'This text shows that it is money rather than social class that influences the decisions we make.'

Discuss.

The Novel Girl with a Pearl Earring shows us that money is more important, more so than social class, influencing the decisions we make every day. Griet choosing to become a maid and earn money for her family, not because she wanted to, because her dad couldn't work due to injury suffered before hand.

Griet is a young girl who is naive and attractive. Later on in the novel when Griet is starting to see more of Peter and her parents invite him around, it is that he is a butchers son and to Griet's family that could mean being well fed and not poor.

Assessor comments

- This response is brief in the extreme and totally insubstantial.
- It is colloquial and lacking in consistent expressiveness.
- The student is unable to sustain a meaningful response to the topic as given; however, the student **has** made an attempt to deal with the topic.

Section 2 – Writing task

The Writing task scenario this year seemed to attract student interest, and there was a spirited involvement with all of the tasks on offer, especially in Part 2.

The material was authentic, with the central piece for language use analysis being representative of a good deal of commonly available media material. It included a range of text types as well as traditional material.

Part 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	4	9	16	21	19	14	7	3	1	5.2

The focus material this year was one piece of writing – a magazine article. Within that one piece, however, were two very clear positions on communication, each using language designed to persuade the audience to accept the point of view of the writer. As shown by the high-scoring example below, the very best responses for this part were perhaps better than ever in their sensitivity to the power of language and their capacity to analyse the direction and techniques employed by the article's author.

Unfortunately, however, the responses of many students fell short of such insight. Many still confused language use analysis with argument analysis. Some came equipped with their lists of language techniques (rhetorical question, appeal to authority, etc.) and proceeded to label these wherever they could find them – some were even labelled where they did not actually exist. In some cases, the actual mnemonic that the student had memorised was written in a list on the inside script book



cover and had the potential to lead to confusion and obscuring of the task at hand. Some capable students actually disadvantaged themselves through such labelling.

While weaker student responses used listing of language techniques, the better responses ‘worked with’ language, showing evidence of ‘hearing’ the voice and language of the writer. The work done with texts in preparation for Section 1 of the exam is a starting point for language analysis in Section 2. How can we decide on Hamlet’s motives unless we hear not only what he says, but what he **means**? Likewise, students every day make decisions based on what they hear or read or see in other people’s language forms – something is said or written aggressively, invitingly, sincerely... The higher scoring responses in this part of the examination revealed that students understood that the language in question had been selectively chosen to suit the writer’s purpose.

The skills nurtured in Outcome 1 should be built upon so that students can talk with accuracy and meaning, in their own terms, about how language is being used. Listing of language techniques has far less relevance than ‘hearing’ what the writer actually means and is saying.

The following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

The author of the article ‘The Write Stuff’ discusses the recent trend towards electronic communication, and away from the more traditional form of letter-writing. The article, published in a popular magazine, appears to be aimed at the adult generation, encouraging a return to letter-writing by highlighting its strengths and comparing them with the weaknesses of e-mail and text messaging.

Valentine’s Day is used as an example of the perfect time to write a letter. The writer urges us to ‘picture this’; going on to vividly describe a scene comparing the experience of receiving ‘an e-card complete with dancing sheep and the words “I Luv ewe”’ to ‘opening a thick red envelope that sprinkles fragrant rose petals...releasing handwritten letter’. This comparison highlights the inadequacy of the ‘e-card’, which appears cheesy and unemotional next to the letter. More imagery is used, comparing letter-writing to dining by candlelight. The use of the catchy ‘roses are red, violets are blue...’ poem also highlights the inappropriate nature of electronic communication in a romantic relationship. The use of Valentine’s Day as an example plays to the insecurity of many individuals, unsure what is appropriate on this day, and influences them to turn to letter-writing.

The author addresses society’s role in the trend away from letter writing, criticizing the ‘need for speed’ brought on by advances in technology. The desire for speed & efficiency are described negatively, using terms such as ‘too impatient’ and ‘hurried existence’ – suggesting that this is having a negative impact on our lives and our relationships. The product of this society, Generation Y, is also under fire; they are described as having ‘the attention span of a gnat.’ This criticism of Generation Y is effective in targeting an older generation of readers, who will recognise this problem – and will therefore be more determined to avoid it in themselves. Electronic communication is described as ‘an abbreviation of real communication’ – yet again, deriding e-mail and SMS, in favour of the more old-fashioned letter writing.

The comparisons between the more emotional, ‘real’ communication of letters and ‘hurried’ electronic messages sets the stage for suggesting letter-writing as a solution to society’s problem. Readers are encouraged to identify with this enthusiasm for letters, ‘unless you’re illiterate or have a heart of stone.’ The author promotes the use of letters in a number of situations – as an ‘intimate, though non-intrusive’ alternative, and ‘perfect for expressing real appreciation’. These statements reinforce the idea that letters represent genuine emotion, compared to the manufactured sentiment of e-cards and the like. The examples used – death, job loss, marriage breakdown, wedding gifts – are all relevant to the age group being targeted by the writer.

The article concludes with a return to the topic of romantic relationships – possibly the area in which the strongest emotions are felt. This reinforces the ongoing idea that when it comes to ‘real’, genuine emotion, letters are the most appropriate option. The return of the ‘roses are red, violets are blue...’ poem serves to further show the importance of expressing real emotion. The poem is so often repeated that it has lost any emotional meaning; demonstrating the similar way in which electric communication is hollow and shows little emotion.

Throughout the piece, the author successfully demonstrates his or her point of view in relation to the replacement of letter-writing by electronic communication – that the only way true emotions can be captured and communicated is by putting them in writing.

Assessor comments

- Initially, the student shows an appreciation of the intended audience and nature of the piece under analysis.
- Throughout this substantial analysis, there is precise exploration and explanation of how language and strategies intentionally persuade.
- The student explains with assurance the more subtle underlying mechanisms of persuasion operating in *The Write Stuff*.
- Short and sharp quotations from the article are used precisely to justify and clarify the insightful commentary.
- There was no tendency to label or paraphrase.



The following is an example of a medium-scoring student response.

The article 'The Write Stuff' uses a variety of language in order to present it's point of view.

At the beginning of the article it has a humourous poem that has a high element of truth in it. This sets the casual, funny tone of the article and also lets readers know their point of view on the matter.

The article then asks people to picture a scenario. This puts people in the issue and makes it personal. In the scenario the technology of a valentines day 'e-card' and a handwritten letter are being compared and the handwritten note is made to sound so much better. This point is emphasised by Margaret Shepherd who is a calligrapher, therefore giving readers the sense that she is an expert and really knows what she's talking about.

The writer the elaborates on the process of writing a letter, making it seem much more important. He/she ask two rhetorical questions to which you just want to scream 'Yes' because it sounds better. No-one wants to appear lazy, even to themselves.

Other examples are provided such as banking, bill-paying, gift-buying and grocery shopping online as further evidence that technology is taking over the good old personal way of doing thing.

In the 6th paragraph we are provided with something to blame for this problem: Information overload. This may set many readers point of view in stone because all areas are covered. They have even added in statistics according to expert Ian Hutchinson to emphasise their point of view.

Furthermore, the also include the opinion of Dr. Bob Montgomery who is the Director of Communication for the Australian Psychological Society. This man has a classy and relevant title and readers are going to listen to what he says because his position gives him credibility.

In the 2nd last paragraph the writer elaborates further on all the positives of letter writing as opposed to technology. 'They're also perfect for expressing real appreciation and can be like fertiliser to a friendship'. This metaphor could strike an emotional cord with some readers who may need to express appreciation or mend a friendship.

The last paragraph tells us the downside of love letter 'It's often said that love letters are the most re-read and regretted' but they rectify this by informing us 'when done right, they can take a relationship to the next level. The key is to be sincere.'

This article obviously holds the point of view that technology does not enhance communication.

Assessor comments

- Approaches organisation of analysis in a random fashion.
- Only reveals an occasional sense of the way in which language has been intentionally used in this article.
- The student has some sense of the task, but lacks precision of language.
- Tends to comment on aspects of the material rather than focusing on the impact of language.

The following is an example of a low-scoring student response.

The author of 'The Write Stuff' article leaps straight into his/her argument with a tone of anxiousness for the rapid increase of electronic communication and the loss of the traditional methods. The author continues this general tone for the duration of the article and employs rhetoric, quotational evidence, the fear of loss and a shameful tone to put together his/her argument.

The author paints the office scene in paragraph two to shame the electronic efforts we go to these days, 'leaving your e-card somewhat pale by comparison'. The author's intention is to make our modern-day, overly simple electronic efforts look almost pathetic compared with those of the more traditional methods. His/her effect is well achieved using the ugly juxtaposition of the easy option versus the more loving, time consuming one.

Her next device is to ask rhetorical questions of the reader without even bothering to include the only answer we have the option of giving. 'Isn't it better to make a gift instead of buying one?' His/her tone here aims to wake us up to the loving ideals that are slipping through our fingers with each SMS. The effect is to cause us to pause for a moment and consider what it means to convey our emotion through effective communication to those around us.

Assessor comments

- The hints at language-use descriptions are muddled with a pseudo-argument analysis.
- The essay tends to list and label language techniques rather than actually analyse.
- The end result is a confused and confusing answer.

Part 2

Option	None	Speech	Essay	Letter
%	2	28	15	56

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	4	9	15	21	21	15	8	3	1	5.4



This part of the examination evoked many very engaged and authentic responses. Students wrote with variety and had plenty to say. The responses were not formulaic (although the high drama of some speeches was sometimes startling) and generally displayed a refreshing independent flair.

Most students worked capably within the prescribed register, even the less-easily-definable essay. The popularity of each task was fairly evenly spread and in each case the arguments were quite well developed, given the obvious time constraints.

Some points of weakness that are worth noting included:

- not all students addressed the precise focus of the task. Some veered towards technology versus tradition rather than the terms outlined
- key words often needed more focus, and many students did not realise the significance of 'enhance'
- audience awareness needs work, so that voice and language can be tailored. For example, high-scoring letters were addressed to the magazine in which the original article appeared.

The following is an example of a student response that scored in the upper range.

To the Editor of Blush: (name of Popular Magazine)

As an avid reader of your magazine, who never misses an issue I was intrigued by the article 'The Write Stuff...' published in last month's issue. I am a Year 12 student who relies heavily on the use of email to complete my studies and find it a most effective means of communication with friends and family. It is my belief that, while it is touching to receive a letter from a friend, email is just as effective if not better means of communication for those of us living in the 21st century today.

At the beginning of this year my sister embarked on a journey overseas as part of a GAP exchange program. As you can imagine, my parents were very worried about her well being and how she is going and wondered how they were going to be able to maintain contact with her on a daily basis. Currently the cost of phone calls overseas are through the roof and not a option given our family's financial situation. Answer: Email! For the past 6 months my sister has emailed us almost daily and allowed my parents to feel comfortable with what she is doing through the cheap and easy access to the internet available. We are even able to effectively 'chat' with her in chat rooms for fraction of the cost that a telephone conversation would cost. For us, the use of email has been a far superior – and undoubtedly – quicker means of communication than any letter.

Although many may argue that email is an 'unpersonal' means of communication, this is simply incorrect. I am a member of generation Y and for us email and other instant messaging systems such as SMS messages is the equivalent to the handwritten notes of the 1800's. Who says email can't allow you to express your feelings? Who says you cannot articulate your emotions through email as you are to swept up in the 'hurried existence' (as your article put it) to write a letter? My boyfriend and I are able to express very deep emotions via email just as our ancestors could, however we have the benefit of faster delivery via the wonders of the world wide web.

I understand that many people – such as the writer of 'The Write Stuff...' believe that the state of our relationships and social communication are at risk due to the heavy use of email. But let's think about the many new relationships that have been formed and further strengthened through online dating and the rise of this instant communication. Many people who struggle to articulate themselves in person have been able to discover their soul mate on the net, and those disabled or lonely have been able to smile a bit more due to the wonders of this communication.

Nobody is saying that letters don't have a place in this world at all, I am simply attempting to emphasise the benefits that instant technological communication can have – for all of us.

Sincerely,

*Holly Smith
–Sunvalley*

Assessor comments

- A strong and clear purpose to this letter is established immediately, with a real response to the feature article.
- The use of supposed personal experience reinforces the view adeptly.
- The letter reasons with the reader in an apt and shrewd manner.
- Throughout the response, the voice adopted is apparent, appropriate and unified, ensuring that this is a strong response to Writing task 2.

The following is an example of a medium-scoring student response.

Dear Editor,

The ways in which you have expressed your views on whether technology enhances communication was an overall good point to make. However, some may believe that writing a letter always could be a little too formal for just a casual message to a friend saying hello. Writing an SMS to a friend saying 'Hello, how are you' etc is always a good thing to get if you haven't spoken to that particular person in a while. Even though it may be better to get a written letter from that friend expressing their thoughts and what not, this doesn't always happen and isn't a worry. We know many people who are guilty of writing an SMS to a friend just to say 'hey' and its not a bad thing, at least you know that person has thought about you and taken the liberty to write to you just if its a 'how are you'.

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Technology has been the thing of the future for a long time and now its here and people are taking advantage of the fact that they can quickly write an email or SMS. Though this isn't the worst thing in the world, some people do appreciate the time and effort others have made to write that long letter, whatever the reason may be. To point on the views of Bob Montgomery, some suggestions he made were a bit too overwhelming for some and putting people down for example, saying 'The current generation has taken to SMSing in droves. These guys are the most visually literate generation...but they've got an attention span of a gnat.' Now what was the point in being rude; I'm sure he can't say that he has never sent an SMS or email to anyone before, that's a little unrealistic to say.

We all have sent SMS or emails before for casual and more formal reasons, that doesn't mean we are dumb, or have an attention span of a gnat, it just means that technology is taking over and people these days are becoming lazy and more into the technology that is available.

*Yours sincerely,
Bianca.*

Assessor comments

- The student fails to immediately establish a real purpose or contention, which is essential in such a piece.
- The letter lacks a definite or perceptible voice.
- The student often rambles in his/her presentation of ideas and views, and takes a haphazard approach to sentence structure.
- The response lacks real control of ideas and a palpable structure.
- The letter lapses in its form as a supposed letter to the editor.