



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2007 English examination assessed student achievement in the skills and outcomes indicated in the *English VCE Study Design*. The final year of that study design was 2007; a new study design will be in use from the beginning of 2008.

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 an analysis of language use, while in the second part students were required to complete one piece of writing in response to the prompt 'Are we overprotected?'; a choice of three options in different form and purpose was offered.

Assessment was based upon criteria and was applied holistically. Scores were awarded that reflected the assessors' judgement of the **whole** answer, using the criteria in balance, 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 the 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. Assessors used the descriptors to make specific judgements about the characteristics of responses to the examination.

Assessors continued to note improvements in all area of the examination. Most students responded well and presented four completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the knowledge and skills required in the course. Both the quality and quantity of work produced under the timed conditions of the examination were quite sound, and at times impressive. The growing awareness of the value of close textual knowledge and careful management of response structure indicates sound teaching and learning.

On the other hand, it should be noted that:

- this is an English examination and strong language skills (including correct spelling and grammar) are expected and necessary for success. In 2007 there was a greater awareness of register, which suggests that teachers and students had noted the advice offered in previous assessment reports
- it is important to continue reminding students of the importance of engaging with the actual elements of the question. Too often students obviously referred to previous years' topics rather than grappling with the specifics of the topic offered in this examination. Students need to contemplate the specific issues offered by the topic presented to them, considering the implications of the topics before they begin writing. Adopting a purely investigative style of response is very challenging and does not always succeed – although top-scoring answers that adopted this approach were superb
- students should organise their time so that enough time is left to proofread their work. While handwriting is not assessed directly, it must be legible. It is accepted that there is obvious pressure in an examination, but there were occasions when words or phrases could not be deciphered.

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. In this assessment report, however, they have been selected both as typical of the better responses from 2007 and as material that may be of some use in preparing students for the re-accredited English course that has been implemented in 2008. 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 factual information.

Section 1 – Text response

There is little doubt that students continue to develop their skills in responding to texts. Many students showed strong familiarity with the text and demonstrated the capacity to use the text in exploring their ideas. There appeared to be far fewer responses that simply provided a plot summary, suggesting that students have been well taught how to select relevant supporting evidence. While there was some evidence of factual error, this was countered by the vast majority of students who had a very good grasp of the text they had studied. Likewise, there was considerable improvement in

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students' understanding of the genre of their selected text. This has been developed demonstrably over recent years. Finally, in regards to the text itself, students should be encouraged to have confidence in their own reading and to demonstrate a personal understanding of their text rather than simply writing what they believe the assessor is looking for. There are no 'expected' responses to a question and the most successful pieces were those that were thoughtful and fresh.

Students should be taught to look critically at the wording of the topic and to consider what assumptions are being made within the topic. Where statements on the topic appear to be absolute statements, students need to have the confidence to consider to what extent they agree with the statement, based on their understanding of the text. The best examples of this can be demonstrated with the following topics.

Part 1

- *Hamlet*: 'At the beginning of the play, Hamlet has lost all sense of purpose. He is a very different Hamlet at the end of the play.' Discuss.
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'It is Winston's vulnerability that defeats him, not the strength of his enemies.' Discuss.
- *The Quiet American*: 'The priest says to Fowler, "I expect you are a good man. I don't suppose you've ever had much to regret".' Is the priest shown to be right about Fowler?

Part 2

- *The Kite Runner*: '*The Kite Runner* shows that cultural values have the power to overcome the values held by the individual.' Discuss.

Students must explore and develop **all** parts of the topic. Too often, competent responses did not achieve their potential because they focussed on only one portion of the topic and ignored another. Often there is a tension between two or more parts to a topic and, where elements are juxtaposed, students need to look at how they are contrasted, as well as what this might reveal. The most common examples of topics which were only partially considered included the following.

Part 1

- *Look Both Ways*: 'The characters in *Look Both Ways* find it impossible to control their fears in a world that is shown to be random and unpredictable.' Discuss.

Part 2

- *Inheritance*: '*Inheritance* challenges the authenticity of what we see as Australian values: a fair go for all and the family as a cherished institution.' Discuss.
- *Lantana*: '*Lantana* shows that emotional honesty is more important than emotional strength.' Discuss.
- *Sky Burial*: '*Sky Burial* shows that it is the journey, not the discovery, that is life-changing.' Discuss.

Finally, almost without exception, students demonstrated a good understanding of the structure for writing an essay. Clear introductions, appropriate paragraphing and the ability to embed quotations appropriately were a feature of most pieces. However, these basic skills must continue to be reinforced, including the ability to build more sophisticated vocabulary, to improve grammar and to focus more on sentence structure.

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>Look Both Ways</i>	15.0%	5.7
<i>I'm Not Scared</i>	11.3%	5.4
<i>Lantana</i>	8.0%	5.6
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i>	7.5%	5.1
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	6.8%	5.6

The least popular texts for this part included *Voices and Visions from India*, *The Baghdad Blog*, *The Stories of Tobias Wolff* and *Home*.

The highest mean scores for Part 1 were achieved by students who wrote on *Selected Poems (Sylvia Plath)*, *Hard Times* and *Hamlet*.



Part 1 of the Text response section assessed students' ability to develop a 'sustained interpretive point of view about a text'. Students continued to show improvement in this part, which was generally very well done. In particular, textual knowledge such as narrative detail and understanding of the key characters and their motives were well demonstrated.

Generally speaking, students wrote equally well across all genres. This is particularly true of the non-print texts, where many students seamlessly incorporated the manner in which visual aspects added meaning to the text. This will be a key feature of the new course and it appears that an understanding of structural development is already being taught well. While the most popular texts (*Look Both Ways* and *Lantana*) did offer a range of quality, many students incorporated film techniques to great advantage.

Another important consideration for both the old and new courses is an understanding of the role of the narrator. Several topics challenged students to consider the impact of the narrator and his or her perceptions towards other characters and to his or her world. Most notably, the topic offered for *I'm Not Scared* called on students to consider the role of a child narrator and how his perceptions of greed and cruelty were conveyed to the reader. Likewise, the role of the Common Man and the way he offers the reader greater insights into the complexity of More's character was a feature of the *A Man for All Seasons* topic.

Some students had an excellent grasp of textual construction and the role of the narrator, as evidenced by the following excerpt.

Too see Michele try to grasp these incredibly complex acts gives the reader an eerie sense of knowing too much; we know why Filippo has been kidnapped, we know why Sergio is coming to stay, but Michele doesn't and every little bit he discovers is made even more chilling by the fact that it's a nine year old child discovering it.

The topic for *Generals Die in Bed* was very popular and allowed for many variations in the way students could explore and express the impact of war. This reinforces the fact that careful selection from a text can provide a student with their own individual approach to a topic. This topic allowed for diverse responses, all of which were equally valued.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. There are often many approaches to answering a topic, all of which may be equally valid. Ultimately the quality of investigation is far more important than coming to a definitive or absolute position, per se. At the same time, however, students may not completely dismiss the topic and offer a totally different proposition. The elements of any topic must be addressed. For example, the topic on *The Quiet American* revealed that some students had obviously come to the examination prepared – and determined – to write an essay on Pyle, while the topic itself focused on Fowler.

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

A Man for All Seasons

How does the Common Man enable the audience to understand the complexities of More's character?

Though A Man for All Seasons in itself is a complicated and sustained view into the lives of those surviving in England under a corrupt system, the Common Man is a vital element in the play that documents the inner struggles of a man torn between 'political realities' of the day and his faith and knowledge of his own character. By acting as a make shift chorus, the Common Man is able to persuade the audience to remain detached in order to consider the many layered, multi-dimensional More and to consider his motivation and reasoning for his action of remaining 'silent'. The Common Man also allows and encourages a very dramatic contrast of character between More and himself, along with what would seem characters of 'all seasons' in Rich and the State. By lacking in character development, the Common Man is able to successfully communicate the intricacies of More's concise and important construction.

From the beginning of the play, opening with a grand declaration of 'the Sixteenth Century is the century of the common man', the audience is immediately aware of his importance in not only beginning, but in the unfolding of events as a sort of commentator as the play progresses. He is meant, as suggested by his distinctive label of 'the common man' and his seemingly unidentifiable 'black' bit of cloth for a costume, to represent a jack-of-all-trades, a shapeshifter. Most importantly, he is a physical presence on stage that communicates directly with the audience – a constant reminder that this play is not meant to be regarded in the hearts of those watching, but with the heads. He often foreshadows events, offering a suggestion that there will be 'something that [More] want to keep; and he'll be out of practice' which in itself does not communicate very much on its own, but allows the audience to critically consider the decisions that More makes – such as the 'appearance' that would come with accepting a 'bribe' – without following too closely specific charges in what would otherwise be an unknown plot. For the whole play, while often occupying character, he encourages the audience to remain detached and focussed on More's character as intelligent and informed individuals, which allows for a greater understanding of More's 'silence', his voyage down an uncharted 'channel' and the impact of his resistance in the state and his family.



The Common Man also allows for an obvious contrast in character. Just as More is described as ‘a man for all seasons’ in his ‘steadfast’ belief in himself and in the path he has chosen in not bending to the marriage, the Common Man also represents a form of complete understanding in himself – while he does not possess the integrity that greatly influences More’s character, he has an inherent will to survive, and in his own way, is steadfast in making sure he succeeds. Though cast as the disloyal ‘steward’, the unsympathetic ‘jailer’, the Common Man is looked upon as having mostly no hand in More’s final sentence – he is merely a man trying to make the best of his disadvantage. In this way, his sort of unbiased, rather objective character with only one will to survive, provides a necessary contrast against More’s seemingly ineffectual character that opposes ‘political realities’ that were ‘inflicted’ on him. His faith in the law, where he finds ‘safety’ is ultimately proved corrupt, and does nothing to keep the power of the state from effectively ‘[seeking his] blood’. The Common Man’s faith remains in his own abilities, labour and not in the ‘theories’ that More does. This contrast, and the ultimate success of the State, and the Common Man over Sir Thomas forces the audience to consider the faults and flaws of all characters, and the effect had changes been made.

Though Richard Rich, Cromwell, and the State do ultimately succeed in getting their consent by death of More, the Common Man also encourages the audience to contrast their actions with his own, untainted survival. The scheming Cromwell, the ‘King’s ear’ that sees ‘things’ happen when the King needs it done, is proved to surrender any integrity that may be similar to the character of More. However, his pre-determination to further his own standard of living and status is quite similar to that of the Common Man, who sees nothing outside his immediate goals. However, these similarities are clearly lacking in Rich, who surrenders both integrity and a ‘friendship’ to satisfy his greed and to provide security for his weak character. Once again, the audience is encouraged to weigh these similarities and differences to determine who the blame should fall upon, who should be left without a faded character and how they would act themselves if they were any one of the individuals that consist of the case.

Though his character is lacking the perfect development of mind as a lead character would illustrate – Sir Thomas More being an excellent example – his major purpose in the play is to act as a device, a mechanism that begins a series of reactions that takes place within the audience. By acting as a chorus, the audience is left to focus on the character complexities without being affected by emotion of the characters. However, the development that the Common Man does possess, his sole desire to survive from day to day, is used as a sort of generic and objective standard which the audience is encouraged to see in order to fully develop an awareness of More’s character and themes and trial of which he ultimately failed.

Assessor comments

- The student assuredly addresses the topic and subtly explores its complexities.
- There is excellent textual support for the student’s view on the Common Man.
- The student shows a capacity to explore Bolt’s work as a play and appropriately incorporates the role of the Common Man into the response in a highly relevant manner.
- The response is crafted so that it builds towards a distinct view in relation to the topic; it is well structured.
- Appropriate vocabulary is used and expression is strong, although not without its problems.

The following is an example of a very good student response.

In the Lake of the Woods

John’s mother says: “It wasn’t just the war that made him what he was”.

From your reading of the text, what motivates John Wade’s actions?

In the Lake of the Woods explores the profound and often secretive nature of the human psyche. John Wade, enigmatic and secretive, is motivated by his relentless pursuit of love and control. Wade is not easily understood and his actions of self-deceit and manipulation are the result of a multitude of experiences – experiences which impacted so greatly on his life such memories need to be erased. Yet O’Brien challenges the reader to see beyond the veneer of childhood and war related trauma and see the very real and dark side of this Vietnam Veteran.

John Wade’s life is plagued by an unrelenting desire for love and absolute control. His childhood abuse by a father he loved so dearly rendered him with a feeling that he was not loved. His father’s alcoholism and frequent verbal abuse ‘jiggling John’ compounded Wade’s feelings of inadequacy, coercing him to resort to magic and trickery to gain the ‘applause of some invisible audience’ and ‘sovereignty over the world’. The sudden loss of his father further corrodes his psyche - exacerbating his need for magic and pretence to deal with his problems. Such a traumatic experience manifested itself into an inextricable need for ‘absolute, unconditional love’ and a simultaneous need for ‘absolute control’. Such needs impact significantly on the rest of his life – guiding Wade upon a life quest to gain love and control. Wade marries Kathy to ensure such love and expresses a need to physically consume her ‘gobble each other up’ and ‘1 + 1 = 0’. The lack of love in childhood manifests itself into his uncertainty about such notions of love and paranoia that he will lose the love of Kathy as he did with his father. Despite Kathy’s assurance that ‘I’m not going anywhere’ Wade ‘squeezes her’ and controls every aspect of her life including innate needs of wanting a child – ‘a goddamn baby – that’s all I ever wanted’. O’Brien suggests that Wade’s love without limit and control is the result of his problematic childhood.

For Wade, going to Vietnam was a medium through which he could satisfy his overwhelming need for love. John ‘went to war for love, only to be loved’. But it was also a place where he could exercise his predilection for secrecy and manipulation. Wade’s insatiable need for love spurned his desire to go to Vietnam. Vietnam was ‘spook country – the geography of evil’ and a place where there were ‘trapdoors and barbed wire’. These motifs carry similarities with magic and as such Wade ‘secretly liked the place’. Such surroundings exacerbated Wade’s proclivity for deceit and magic. The troop of Charlie Company encouraged his



tendencies for magic ‘Sorcerer – how’s tricks’ and through this Wade gained a ‘zingy charge – up feeling’ which he saw to be the next best thing for love. Such practices of magic further impacted on Wade’s already deteriorating psyche, causing him to believe that his atrocities of war, the killings of PFC Weatherby and the old man with the hoe could be erased from consciousness. Wade practised magic on a grand level, suppressing his gruesome memories deep into the subconsciousness to such an extent that he believed that ‘over time, memory itself would be erased’. Such actions of deceit and erasure can be attributed to his childhood where magic and pretence could ‘erase the bad stuff’ from his mind. Simultaneously, such actions of moral culpability render Wade unable to seek a political career which embodies the love which Wade so badly needs. Thus the need to ‘banish them from consciousness’.

While Wade suffered significant traumas in childhood and in war, Wade’s inevitable ‘detachment from the actuality of the world’ can only be wholly explained by the bare nature of Wade. While his childhood abuse and the predilection for love and deceit can explain some of Wade’s actions, to understand Wade completely requires us to read between the lines. Wade consciously and deliberately practises deceit in order to avoid the severe repercussions of war. While Judith Herman states that the ‘natural response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness’ Wade went further, to deliberately change the war records to protect his veneer of decency and virtue. O’Brien offers readers an anti-thesis to Wade in the form of Thinbill who offers Wade a chance to redeem himself and naturally ‘get it off our chest’ as ‘honesty is the best policy’. Instead Wade chooses to deceive all those who love him and himself. While childhood trauma can cause such tendencies to gain love, Wade’s purposeful deceit of others and concocted morality cannot be attribute to anything, but his perverted notion that he must gain love at all costs.

Wade’s perverted psyche is one that was cultivated and shaped by his childhood demons. His intense need for love and control saw him pursue these through his marriage and participation in war. However Wade’s deepest secrets and his great lengths to banish them from consciousness reveal a darker side of Wade.

Assessor comments

- This is a well-written response which explores Wade’s motivations and embraces the complexity of the character created by Tim O’ Brien.
- The topic is appropriately qualified and some interesting assertions about Wade and what motivates him are examined.
- Very good textual knowledge is shown.
- Quotations were not confined to Wade but some of the ‘extraneous’ material from the text is incorporated.
- The student shows very good control of language and expression, but this is not without its problems.
- There is an assurance about the response, which does not take a simple approach.

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>Look Both Ways</i>	16.8%	5.2
<i>Lantana</i>	16.4%	5.8
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i>	6.6%	4.7
<i>The Quiet American</i>	5.4%	6.2
<i>I’m Not Scared</i>	4.7%	4.9

The least popular texts for this part included *Voices and Visions from India*, *The Baghdad Blog*, *Selected Poems (Sylvia Plath)*, *Fine Line* and *Home*.

The highest mean scores for Part 2 were achieved by students who wrote on *Hard Times*, *The Plague*, *Selected Poems (Sylvia Plath)* and *The Stories of Tobias Wolff*.

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. The skills required here are the same as those required in the Key Knowledge and Key Skills of the new English course. Students need to thoroughly understand what a text is doing and how it works. Part 2 offered the opportunity to work with the text and its wider social, political and cultural contexts.

The notions and concepts underpinning this approach to text stay on long after plot and character and the like fade. This is the raw material which will likely have some part in creating students’ own reflective positions as they mature. Study of the ideas in texts thus enables students to draw on their experience and assists them in formulating their positions in relation to the world of ideas and the decisions necessary in it. It works with and explores responses to abstract, underlying notions which texts rest on 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.

Most students were able to tackle the basic propositions of the questions to some degree. Certainly more students and teachers seemed to understand the principles behind Part 2 text responses.

It was pleasing to note that very few students fell into the trap – often seen in the past – of failing to focus on the text but rather, inappropriately, using examples from **outside** the text. A single reference may be illustrative, but multiple paragraphs exploring external situations are not within the guidelines of the task. However, **never** actually leaving text is clearly equally inappropriate.

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

Hard Times

Hard Times demonstrates the importance of emotional as well as intellectual growth.

For a person to be well developed and achieve happiness in life, a well-rounded education and upbringing is pertinent. Without imagination and grace, it is easy for a person to become lost or worse, cold and empty as a result. Development of the intellect is important for a successful career later in life, but ignorance of the need for imagination and creativity only creates incomplete and emotionally damaged human beings. In Charles Dickens' Hard Times, he demonstrates the importance of beauty and imagination in the lives of children as a factor in determining their happiness and ability to do well in life. Those who care only for factual education, however, and ignore emotional development will turn out to be cold and heartless human beings.

When facts alone are cared for in life, and emotional development suppressed, the outcome can mean human beings who are unable to achieve happiness and whose well-beings are scarred. Dickens demonstrates through the characters of Louisa and Tom Gradgrind that when 'facts alone are wanted in life', the result can be disastrous indeed. Louisa has a disposition to wonder and be imaginative, but she is instructed to 'never wonder' from childhood and thus is suppressed early on. With 'a light with nothing to rest upon, and a fire with nothing to burn', she is emotionally starved and later becomes a 'cold impassive and proud' person. Without having developed her emotional side, Louisa enters into a Loveless marriage, where it is all 'transaction from first to last'. Without the cushion of better judgement for her feelings, she breaks down after being seduced by James Harthouse, and runs away to her father, condemning him for his methods of upbringing. She is unable to know her own heart, whether she loves Harthouse or not, and is consequently miserable as a result. It is only Sissy who can heal Louisa's scars, with her 'brave affection' and 'devoted spirit'. It is significant that Sissy is Louisa's healing light since she is a person who has engaged in imaginative desires growing up, suggesting that because of it, Louisa can learn from her and recover.

Tom is another case for the failure of Gradgrind's educational philosophy. He becomes a thief and a liar, and is eventually, sent away. Gradgrind is thus made to see the error of his ways, through these two examples of 'model' children. Tom, like Louisa, is stifled from a young age and is only taught the 'ologies' of the world, yet yearns for amusements, as demonstrated by his and Louisa's going to the circus. Tom is not a deep and moral character, who has never received any guiding and virtuous values in life and is thus vulnerable to a descent into vice and trickery. Because his emotional growth is limited, Tom becomes a hedonistic and careless person, indulging in smoking and drinking and gambling, getting himself into debt. Eventually, he is sent away as a result of his committing the bank robbery. Dickens shows that when 'facts are the only faculty' to which one emphasizes in a child's education, the results can be devastating indeed.

Similarly, when facts alone are cared for in life, one can become self-interested and compassionless. Bitzer is an exemplary student in the Gradgrind school where only intellect is valued in terms of facts and statistics. He lacks all compassion for fellow human beings, however, and is completely self-interested. When his father dies he sends his own mother to the slave labour-like 'workhouse' as it means he won't have to spend money caring for her. He does not care for 'a family' and hence believes others to be the same. Because he is cold and selfish, society does not benefit from having a character like Bitzer. Dickens describes his mind as 'completely regulated and free from affections', condemning Bitzer to never knowing true happiness. Bitzer is not emotionally developed, and cares only for his own self-interest. Thus, he has no qualms in spying on Tom Gradgrind, even though it is immoral to do so. Gradgrind is made to see how much his system has failed when he appeals to Bitzer's emotions. This does not work since Bitzer only cares for his own advancement, and does not have 'a heart'. Just like his definition of a house as 'Graminivorous' and 'Quadruped', Bitzer having succeeded in Gradgrind's educational system, becomes only an empty shell of a human being, unable to ever experience true happiness.

On the other hand, when one is able to fully develop both the emotional and intellectual side of themselves, this can lead to a fulfilling life and happy future. Sissy Jupe is able to have the best of both worlds, coming from the circus and receiving a factual education. At the circus, she is able to indulge in imaginative graces and read about 'the Fairies, the dwarves, the genies and the Hunchback'. The compassion for all those she loves in the circus has also helped her to come and emotionally well-rounded human being. Even though she is unable to achieve much at Gradgrind's school, she is still grateful and manages to finish. Sissy, being emotionally rounded, can be a powerful influence upon others and help them too. She delights the younger Gradgrind with fancies and wonderment, thus insuring they will grow up happy and not emotionally scarred such as their sister, Louisa. Having grown up under the circus, and taught the values of 'faith, hope and charity', Sissy is able to live a rewarding and happy life with 'lots of happy children'.

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Emotional growth is just as important as intellectual growth as it creates well-rounded, balanced human beings, who are able to rise above the challenges of life. Although, with only fact, one can become successful at life, it is only a life which is empty and incomplete. Dickens shows that the power of the imagination is just as great, if not greater, than factual knowledge.

Assessor comments

- The student has considered the topic and assuredly develops a response, never losing track of the topic.
- The response contains qualifications and a detailed exploration of the topic.
- The student has reached conclusions in respect to the **individual ideas presented**.
- There is excellent balance between a detailed use of text and the capacity to step away from the text to explore the ideas of the topic.
- The response is highly conceptual, which is at the heart of Part 2.
- The student shows confident control of language and expression.

Section 2 – Writing task

The writing task scenario seemed particularly engaging and relevant to students in 2007. Most students appeared enthusiastic in their responses and many wrote passionate points of view in Part 2. Certainly all students understood the material and had something to say on the issue of overprotection.

Part 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	1	3	8	14	21	21	16	9	3	1	5.4

There were two pieces for analysis in 2007: the first was an article from a retired principal condemning the over-protectiveness of parents, and the second was a letter to the editor from a parent who felt that today's world has become dangerous and that parental responsibility demands greater protection of children. Virtually all students responded to both pieces and most presented fairly complete answers.

A visual image, which could be used as a visual stimulus, also appeared on the two page spread. A small percentage of students interpreted this as part of the analysis material and added this to their discussion of the written material. No student was disadvantaged by incorporating the visual into their response, and those who demonstrated an adept understanding of how visual language may be used to support a point of view were rewarded. The analysis of visual material is one of the subtle changes to the 2008 English course for this section. It is evident that many students are already proficient in this aspect of analysis.

The provision of such rich material enabled nearly all students to respond to the task. Most students demonstrated a solid understanding of the task and even the less able students found some 'words' that were used to have an impact on the reader. Simplistic listings of supposed persuasive techniques were very rarely seen in responses, which was a considerable improvement on the past. The best responses showed excellent analysis that was quite sophisticated.

Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement and students should be encouraged to be more specific in their analyses. Too many students offered a discussion of a general effect rather than a specific impact on the audience. Comments such as 'grab the readers' attention' or 'to get the reader interested' are far too generalised and vague. Likewise, students need to go beyond statements such as 'makes the reader feel scared' and explore the implication of this intention in relation to the writer's purpose. Teachers should spend time throughout the year drawing attention to the impact of specific words and phrases intentionally selected by the writer to support the purpose of the piece.

The best responses for Part 1 deliberately set out to explore and analyse the way **language** was used in presenting each of the two pieces. These students often referred to the difference between each piece in a concise and clear movement from one to the other. Most students constructed their response so that they explored the first piece, offered thoughtful and transitional insights, and then analysed the second piece. Other students chose to integrate the two pieces throughout the essay. The construction of the response is at the students' discretion, and neither approach was more successful than the other; however, some students who chose to integrate the two pieces found the task too difficult to complete in the allocated time and the piece became convoluted and confused. Others organised the integration well but the comparisons were superficial and plot driven. Certainly, students should have the opportunity throughout the year to try different approaches to structure until they discover the organisation that best suits their thinking and the material they have been presented. Ultimately, teachers and students must be aware of the importance of developing 'a coherently constructed piece of prose'.



It was critical that students considered, identified and reflected upon the target audience of each piece and the resulting tonality that stemmed from the two quite different pieces on offer.

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

On the opinion page, located in the publication The Daily News, two articles present opposed viewpoints on the topic of childhood over-protection. The article 'Overprotective parents stifle growth' is an agitated and desperate presentation of the consequences of overprotection from the perspective of a retired principal, and 'Reality Check' is a sentimental imploration for the preservation of hope and innocence from the perspective of a parent.

Each article sets out its intended audience by its distinct tone. 'Overprotective parents' begins with a series of cynical and frustrated rhetorical questions that emphasizes that society and parents are to blame for the 'mollycoddling' of our children. 'Mollycoddling' is intended along with the sarcastic emphasis on 'protect' to subvert the actions of parents and highlight their flaws. As such, the intended audience is both the frustrated onlookers of parental flaws and the parents themselves as the article aims at a rude awakening, 'unable to cope with future challenges'. 'Reality Check' aims at a sentimental audience of parents that will relate to the author's 'love of "my kids"'. Furthermore the author's sojourn into the memories of his grandad, 'the good old days' is simultaneously intended to create a feeling of reverence at the safety that was once experienced and juxtapose this with 'everywhere I turn I see danger'.

In this respect both authors draw upon their own personal rhetoric and life experience in an effort to persuade their respective audience. The retired principal perceives the problem as 'perfectly clear' (an effort to suggest her credibility as a 'professional' and to highlight her practical elicitation of the issue) and draws upon her wealth of experience as a principal. The juxtaposition of 'perfect children' and 'incidents at school' is intended to imply the rueful bias of parents and attempts to underline the parental instinct. The subversion of parent to 'taxi service', 'running little errands' and 'completing...homework' are examples of this attempt at the denigration of parental practices. On the other hand, the author of 'Reality Check' sees the importance of parental involvement, 'I say unsupervised is unsafe' and uses a variety of common examples. 'Cars are lethal weapons', the 'news at 6' (a common social information provider) merely relays 'carnage' and 'massacre'. The compact repetition of destruction seeks to instil a feeling of fear in the sentimental readers, who would relate more to the author's belief in 'love and hope'. In the comparison of the two the author attempts a persuasion on the basis of the nurturing desires of parents.

Furthermore, in their exploration of the consequences of current acts, each takes a significantly different approach in crafting their versions of the new society. To the author of 'Overprotective Parents', the result is 'clear', teenagers 'incapable of making decisions', 'followers not leaders'. In overprotecting, as the title suggests, parents are inhibiting, 'stifling' their child's capacity to grow. Obviously this is an attempt at fear and the promotion of self-reflection from the parents' view. In doing this the author aims to get parents to consider the consequences of 'wrapping up children in cotton wool'. The implication of children being treated as objects which is reflected in the central graphic is intended to subvert parental faith in overprotective practices. This is reflected in the principal's use of empirical research data which reflects the consequences of 'lonely and isolated' youngsters. This research by the Children's Society, compounded with the suggestion of a 'mountain of evidence' behind it is a point which aims at suggesting there are consequences which parents may not have considered in their bias. This appeal to fear and responsibility once again questions parental motive.

Conversely, the author, Jack Lee finally warns about the necessity to instil 'hope and love', because that is the only pathway to 'make them feel they can make a difference'. His sentimentality juxtaposed with the suggestion of being 'traumatized' by reality aims to affirm to his audience that the protective measures are acceptable.

Both authors assert their view to the respective audiences through differing tones. Jane Brown focuses on the consequences and harshly compounds her point of overprotection with empirical research and parental experience whereas Jack Lee, as a parent, aims at the dangers of the real world and sentimentally advocates the responsibilities of parents to 'love' and protect their children.

Assessor comments

- The student shows a perceptive understanding of the ways in which language is used by the authors.
- The response is quite specific in its exploration of language use.
- There is a clear processing of the material and a sharp focus on language use.
- The intended impact of language on the reader – in respect to its context – is lucidly presented.
- Assured, confident and appropriate language is selected by the student.
- The response shows an excellent control of language and the piece is fluent and well written.

The following is another example of a high-scoring response.

The need to present today's youth with the best of opportunities to live a fulfilled life and the role that parenting styles plays in this is explored by the two articles. Retired Principal Jane Brown contends that today's parents 'overprotect' their children and this has terrible consequences on the future of their children. Brown adopts a reasoned and informed manner, primarily using her credibility as a retired principal to appeal to parent readers who are ready to be frustrated by the incessant needs of their children, and also readers who are concerned with the future intellectual and emotional development of their children. Jack Lee, however, in response to the opinion pieces expostulates his viewpoint that children need increased measures of protection in



today's world. He adopts a slightly enraged tone, primarily trying to appeal to readers who are willing to be confronted by the everyday cruelties of the world.

Jane Brown appears intent on appealing to the parent reader's concern for the intrinsic development of their children in the future. The fact that overprotection leads to 'defenceless young people' who do not 'learn how to cope with life', eventually never becoming 'fully functioning adults' is meant to create a sense of alarm and caution in the reader over the welfare of their children if they continue to overprotect them. The reader is led to reconsider his/her approach to parenting as Brown attempts to capitalise on parents' insecurities of their children leading 'depressed, overaggressive, antisocial' lives. The reader is hence encouraged to reject the notion of pampering their children and adopt more realistic and worldly approaches to controlling their children.

Furthermore, Brown also attempts to include common experiences in leading them to see the futility and disastrous consequences of their actions. By mentioning that overprotective parents 'blindly search for the child's lost jumper', 'provide a continuous taxi service' and 'bring lunch when it is forgotten', Brown attempts to place the reader to consider his/her past experiences and see that it fits into what is stereotypically perceived to be characteristics of the overprotective parenting role. The parent reader is thus led to see the error of their ways and encouraged to discontinue such actions which Brown directly links to the dire future consequences for their children.

Where Brown appears predominantly interested in the more intangible and intrinsic aspects of the development and parenting of a child, Jack Lee attempts to primarily conjure notions of the physical well-being of children and how this is threatened by the realities of the external world.

Lee attempts to conjure war-like imagery in the reader by commenting on the 'lethal weapons' of 'hoons' and 'scenes of carnage' and 'bloodiest massacre' being displayed on television and characteristic of the real world. As a result, the parent reader is almost led to believing in the merit of placing curfews on their children. The reader is coerced into sensing the need to protect their children from physical damage from the destructiveness and obscenities of this war-like image of the world in which they live.

It is also significant that Lee conjures the notorious notions surrounding the term 'internet'. In today's world where multimedia receives publicity for the sex-related extremities it provokes, the term 'internet' attempts to bring in the reader's pre-bias and preconceived notions regarding the use of the world-wide web into their decision of the type of parenting control needed. The reader is reminded of the need for them to protect their children from these exterior evils, and is hence positioned to see exerting strict, parent controls on their children as being the most obvious way of securing the welfare of their children.

Assessor comments

- The student shows a clear capacity to step away from the specific language and demonstrate a good sense of purpose for the articles.
- There is a strong sense of how specific language is being used to influence and persuade readers.
- While there is not a detailed distinction between the pieces, an understanding of the purpose of each is clear.
- The response is assured and well written.

Part 2

This part of the examination produced many thoughtful and engaging responses. Students wrote enthusiastically about their view of a world that appears to be more protective and paternalistic than in the past. For the most part, students clearly understood the expectations for this section. While a point of view in response to specific material will no longer be part of the examination from 2008 onwards, it is still part of the key learning in this area of the study; in addition, there is capacity for understanding of the conventions, tone and style, and the skill of persuasive writing to be tested in the Context section of future examinations.

Option	% of students	Average score out of 10
1 Speech	45%	5.52
2 Essay	9 %	5.45
3 Letter to the editor	44%	5.35

The best responses continue to be those that clearly and appropriately link purpose, audience and form, using language and ideas to present a point of view. Some students did not pay enough attention to form, and thus too many responses were generic in their construction and selection of language.

Responses that adopt a particular persona can be successful but there are cautions that students should consider. The persona needs to be credible, authentic and realistic. As well, students should recognise that it must be in a sustained register in keeping with the character or persona adopted. These need to be carefully crafted. Implausible personas are more trouble than they are worth.



Likewise, extended narratives or stories that were, in general, relevant, but did little more than repeat the same point were not successful. The capacity to craft a piece of writing with an incisive point of view which critically explores the contention and leads the reader to a logical conclusion is a skill that must be developed throughout VCE English.

Authentic writing is sought, valued and to be encouraged. Students should be aware that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' stance in respect to the viewpoint adopted in this part. A clear and succinct view in accurate form is sought, not a rambling undefinable narrative or some imagined politically correct stand.

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

Option A

You are to speak at a public forum. Your topic is 'Are we overprotected?'

Write a speech expressing your point of view on this topic.

The world is changing and so should we. Violence, drugs and sex-related crimes seem to be a part of today's society, and as a result, the need arises to adapt ourselves to such an evolving community where our values and societal morals are being constantly re-defined.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and the young people seated here today, my name is John Sence and I am a current year 12 student. Are we being overprotected? My belief is that the nature of today's society compels greater protection for youngsters. True, certain aspects of decision-making should be left to an individual's discrepancy, but children and adolescents these days require greater parental protection and as such, we are not being overprotected.

In the days that have gone by it is perhaps true that parents had a laissez-faire style approach in looking after the welfare of their children. But the society we live in has changed in many respects my dear audience. The media today is nothing but an outlet for commercial and corporate advertising that attempts to use violence and sex as major appeals to the youth of today. As the internet becomes more encompassing and technologically advanced so too would the potential for young people to corrupt themselves with the major evils of the adult world. To the parents seated here today, the technological development of today's society compels you to exert greater, authoritative control over your children. You must have their best interests at heart!

However, it is perhaps fair to assert that today's society is composed of some self-interested adults who believe themselves to be the centre of the world perhaps due to extensive childhood pampering. It has also been suggested that these individuals lack core values that we as a society uphold; such as care and compassion for other human beings and members of society. Thus it is my opinion that even though strict and more rigid parenting controls are needed, this should not manifest into pampering type of approach. Greater controls over technology should be put in place by parents, but yet again these controls should not act to shield the children from the real world or other people. Greater control that has elements of flexibility is what is needed.

As we as a society understand, the individual has a right to self-determination and making his/her own choices to dictate his/her experience of life. This is one of the founding principles of our democratic society. But surely this principle cannot be applied to youngsters and children who lack the maturity to make individual decisions that safe-guard their welfare. It is hence in the hands of parents to ensure the safety of their children by making the decisions for them until they reach a stage where they are capable of making choices that are beneficial for one and all.

Dear audience, it is no doubt that society has changed and we are compelled to change with it. Our children definitely need to be protected as today's youth is tomorrow's future! Thank you for your kind attention.

Assessor comments

- The response begins with a thoughtful opening, which is then revisited in the conclusion.
- The student possesses a strong voice that is sustained throughout the speech.
- There is an assured use of language.
- A clear point of view is developed and sustained well.