

2019 VCE English examination report

General comments

The 2019 VCE English examination consisted of three sections: Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text offered students the choice of two distinct topics for each of the 20 texts and students were required to complete one response; Section B – Comparative analysis of texts asked students to meaningfully compare and contrast the ideas and issues in a chosen pair of texts; and Section C – Argument and persuasive language required students to analyse the ways in which argument and language were used by Hailey Astaire and Samuel Morricone in their respective opinions on cashless transactions in supermarkets.

Assessment is global and norm-referenced. It is based upon criterion-referenced descriptors, which are applied holistically and reflect the assessor's estimate of the **whole** answer. There is no such thing as the 'right' answer; the assessors make judgments about the unique qualities of what is written by each student, understanding that this is first draft writing completed under the time constraints of an examination.

More than 40 000 students sat for the 2019 VCE English examination and the skills and qualities shown by most students were pleasing. Most students were able to present three completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of the knowledge and skills required in the study. Students tended to write at length, with very few incomplete answers. Assessors noted that students generally displayed a sound command of essay structure and many gave indications of strong core knowledge in their answers, particularly in Section A. It appears that most teachers and students have a clear understanding of the current Study Design.

Nevertheless, some general observations for continued improvement are as follows:

- Students must answer the actual question posed; this is of critical importance and applies to all parts of the examination. It was disappointing to see clearly competent students failing to address the set question or twisting its meaning to suit their own purposes. Relevance to the topic is of primary importance in each section of the examination.
- The matter of prepared answers versus preparing well is worthy of student reflection. Assessors noted a marked increase in answers that were learned excerpts from either commercial guides or VCE help sites on the internet. Students should prepare well and develop their own responses that may be influenced by their reading and teaching, but which should ultimately reflect an honest authenticity.
- Handwriting is increasingly causing problems for the assessors. Legibility is a significant issue and students need to be aware that assessors can only mark what they can read. They are not permitted to guess or infer meaning, so students can disadvantage themselves by not expressing their ideas in a clear, accurate form.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Throughout the report, sample student responses are provided for illustrative and informative reasons, and they may form the basis of profitable discussions. These samples should not be taken as the best that is possible; none is without shortcomings of one sort or another. They are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses. Readers will be able to make many more observations about the quality of these responses beyond the comments offered in this report.

Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text

Many students were able to present a close analysis of their chosen text. These students were able to engage in a rich discussion of the text through the lens of the topic, and were fluent and comprehensive in their approach to the task. Well-prepared students were mindful of the four assessment criteria for this section: knowledge and understanding of the text, a coherent analysis in response to a topic, textual evidence to support the interpretation and controlled and effective language use.

The most popular text was *Rear Window*. Both topics for this text afforded opportunities for students to draw upon their close textual knowledge and demonstrate their essay-writing skills. The highest-scoring responses revealed not only assured textual analysis and close knowledge, but also a willingness to challenge the extent to which the topic was applicable and subsequently to fully resolve it. The most assured responses to the first topic reflected a careful consideration of the word ‘cynical’ and explored the extent to which this was justified as a descriptor of the relevant relationships. In the case of the second topic, the highest-scoring responses made Lisa the centre of their discussions and argued strongly for or against her heroic status.

While most students demonstrated knowledge of their selected text, a significant number revealed a lack of assuredness in constructing an essay in response to the topic. The wording of the topic should be closely considered so that the whole proposition is fully understood. Higher-scoring responses discussed the implications of specific aspects of a topic; lower-scoring responses did not define the terms sharply enough, or ignored them. Students sometimes did not clarify their understanding of concepts such as social responsibility, confusing it with ‘who was responsible’ for an event or occurrence.

Some responses did not directly address the given topic. Sometimes this was a result of inadequate understanding of the complexity of the topic. An example of this style of misreading would be in response to Question 12ii. *Persepolis: The Story of A Childhood*. Higher-scoring responses reflected an understanding that this question was an invitation to engage in a discussion about the function of forgiveness within the text and how this shaped the readers’ understanding of the issues. These essays were able to fully discuss and resolve the topic.

Students are encouraged to use their dictionaries to determine the exact meaning of words in essay topics. For example, the following essay questions challenged students due to their uncertainty about the vocabulary used in the topic: Question 16ii. ‘*Stories We Tell* portrays the **interplay** between loss and hope’ and Question 13i. ‘In *Rear Window*, Hitchcock presents a **cynical** view of relationships’ (emphasis added).

Some students were unable to use the words ‘interplay’ or ‘cynical’ with accuracy. A marked number of *Rear Window* essays ignored the word ‘cynical’ altogether. An accurate understanding of the terms of the topic allowed students to answer the question in a precise manner. It also increased the chance of the student recognising and addressing the implications of the topic.

Students must address the topic in a direct manner. The second question on *Rear Window* invited students to address the proposition that 'Lisa is the real hero of *Rear Window*.' Students who did not score well dismissed Lisa in a one-sentence statement in their introduction and wrote an essay that focused on Jeff and his heroic characteristics; students who scored highly recognised that the question asked if they 'agreed' with the proposition about Lisa. Certainly, students were welcome to disagree with the proposition, but the focus of the discussion needed to remain on the nominated character of Lisa.

Students and teachers should consider the scope of any 'how' question; for example, '**How** does Polley's documentary show the far-reaching impact of family secrets?' or '**How** does *Nine Days* explore the relationship between the past and the present?' Questions such as these required a discussion of the construction elements of the text as well as a discussion of the ideas. The relationships in both texts are presented to the reader in carefully chosen ways; the textual choices made by the author are imperative to understanding how the reader is positioned to interpret the characters. The student is invited to look closely at the ways in which these relationships were explored.

One characteristic of high-scoring essays was recognition of the ways in which the ideas the student intended to discuss were connected. This was evident in the introduction of the following high-scoring response to Question 20i. on *Women of Troy*.

Euripides' play created during the siege of Melos and performed to Athenian men, establishes that the Gods are the ultimate deciders of fate and thus displeasing them is a dangerous action. He argues that successful and obedient worship is an important factor of a successful life, whereas betraying or insulting the Gods is a devastating action with severe consequences. However, through his play he also contends that people have control of their lives to an extent, regardless of the capricious Gods' plans.

When studying collections of poetry and short stories it is important for students to remember that they are commenting on the collection and not only on one or two specific short stories or poems. Higher-scoring responses to these texts presented a thematic discussion of the topic. *Like a House on Fire* was not always answered as well as expected because students tended to give a summary of stories rather than addressing them in greater depth to respond to the topic and demonstrate textual understanding. Similarly, a number of responses to *Island: Collected Stories* tended to be structured around the stories rather than the key ideas of the topic, which limited their complexity.

It is essential that students avoid memorising a response and then trying to apply it to an unseen topic. Topics provide students with an opportunity to apply their textual knowledge and insights in a fresh and thoughtful manner, not in a pre-learned, semi-relevant manner. There seemed to be a number of memorised introductions and paragraphs that had little connection to the set question. Many of these sounded quite erudite, especially the introductions to *Frankenstein*, but the essays themselves lacked relevance to the set topics.

The following extracts, taken from a high-scoring response to Question 13i. on *Rear Window*, demonstrate the quality of thinking that follows careful consideration of the topic, strategic planning, good textual knowledge and some appropriate essay writing skills.

'We've become a race of Peeping Toms' declares Stella, as people are more concerned with 'psychoanalysing each other' than forming real relationships in Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 thriller Rear Window. What emerges from Rear Window is Hitchcock's subtle utilisation of Freudian drama highlighting the adversarial relationships between men and women by projecting beneath their civilized personas. The master of suspense elevates his film to that of a psycho-sexual study on human relationships. The pervasive male gaze, a Freudian understanding of suppressed desires is L. B. Jeffries' unwillingness to commit to his 'too perfect' girlfriend, Lisa emphasising the cynicism of men towards women. Using a carefully handcrafted set, Hitchcockian troupes and a script full of double entendres, Hitchcock takes a straightforward murder mystery plot to a discourse of latent violence that arise from men's unrealistic views. Of

course, *Rear Window* is just a depiction of a broader society gripped by McCarthyism, and rife with dysfunctional relationships.

A large part of the murky subtext of the exploration of Jeff's gaze comes from Hitchcock's insistence that for men and women in postwar America, 'looking' and 'being looked' at are not only conduits for desire but power and agency. To this end, Jeff's preoccupation for control results in a rather solipsistic and cynical view of women. The opening sequence hints to us the grim implication of the battle of the sexes; 'Men are you over 40? When you wake up, do you feel tired and run down?' Indeed, Jeff is the embodiment of the 1950's post-war male anxieties due to shifting gender dynamics and so finds comfort in his large telephoto camera, a 'portable keyhole', to act as a phallus substitute. The framed negative of a model is a sly indication that Jeff perceives women as sinister. Jeff states that he never has 'more than a week's salary in the bank' admitting that Lisa is 'too good' for him and he is, in fact, afraid of her. Hitchcock's employment of ominous shadows introduces the femme fatale, in true film noir fashion, as an oppressive force over Jeff's life. However, this is juxtaposed with Lisa's ethereal close-up 'indeed belonging to the rarified atmosphere of Park Avenue'. Yet, she is too eerily out of focus too large for the camera, suggesting that she is too close for Jeff's comfort. His emasculation, delineated by the 'plaster cocoon' and inability to uncork a wine bottle, forces him to compensate for his 'hormone deficiency' preferring the illusion of power over engaging in intimacy with Lisa. His 'diseased' obsession prominently stems from 'the little neighbourhood' as he watches Lars Thorwald be freed from his 'nagging wife'. It can be interpreted that Jeff is subconsciously intrigued that he too can 'get rid' of Lisa and be freed from his anxieties. Yet, the imprinting 'Here lies the broken bones of L. B. Jeffries' is a macabre foreshadowing that Jeff will be unable to repair his fractured masculinity. Hence, the desire for power and control cause men to view women as one-dimensional and narrow offering very little meaning to their relationships.

A symptom of the cynical perceptions of women is that men see it as a right to be sexist and misogynistic towards them It is Doyle who affirms the misogynistic views of the 1950s America, scoffing at Lisa's 'feminine intuition' as a 'fairytale' even though her observations were correct. Women's bodies are a constant visual motif to be leered at, humiliated and cut up. Even Hitchcock's mise-en-scene positions Miss Torso to be visually dissected by her window frames, a macabre pun to Anna Thorwald's 'cut up' body. The Kuleshov effect becomes the principal visual language displaying Doyle ogling Miss Torso while giving a predatory grin effectively stripping her of any individuality. When Doyle and Jeff are discussing the unsettling possibilities of 'cutting up a human body', the gravity of the situation is juxtaposed by the jovial strains of *Il Canivale di Venezia* illustrating the murder as humorous and comical. Perhaps, this was Hitchcock's way of slyly condemning men for their callous disregard of women; their insensitive nature to such gendered violence is evidence of a moral failure. It is no doubt, the film satirizes human relationship but portrays it in such a way where we realise how sinister and cynical relationships were in 1950's America.

Of course, *Rear Window*'s carefully handcrafted set, growing sense of paranoia and glimpses of 'the secret, private world' is a depiction of a larger society filled with cynicism towards women; a broken community. Indeed, *Rear Window* is the paradox of living in a large city, residing in close proximity with others does not translate to a sense of community. It is no doubt that the lack of interactions and visually segmented Manhattan complex (by fencing and terracing) are indicative of the erosion of communal bonds. The dog owner's soliloquy "Neighbours like each other" is dismissed through most of the film's duration. The party goes callously disregard that it 'was only a dog' and a dismissive hand flick fulfills that community is devoid of any altruism. The fact that 'none of [Thorwald's] neighbours got close to him' further emphasise this disconnect Hitchcock sets up *Rear Window* as a metaphor for the cinematic experience, allowing us to 'peep' into the love life of Jeff and Lisa without consequence. His breaking the fourth wall compels us to acknowledge our preference for vicarious experiences over compassion and our numbness to such event fulfils our insensitivity as 'a race of Peeping Toms'. However, it is no coincidence that Miss Lonelyhearts, who exhibits no voyeuristic behaviours seems to be the only neighbor 'that seems to care'. Her iridescent emerald dress amid the dull surrounding

highlights the intrinsic nature of sympathy in a functioning society. The dog owner's cry of 'Did you kill him because he liked ya?' is a seemingly indirect accusation towards Jeff who is more concerned with '[getting] rid' of Lisa rather than loving her. Hitchcock's depiction of a society gripped by McCarthyism is a construct that exudes distrust, apathy and paranoia

Students who could present an understanding that the text they were discussing was a deliberate construct by the author, designed to present a particular worldview, were better able to demonstrate an insightful reading. The careful inclusion of specific and relevant evidence from the text to support this reading was vital and, when presented with clarity and precision, resulted in high-scoring essays. By contrast, complex-sounding, polysyllabic words inaccurately used by students resulted in confusing prose.

Students who had a detailed knowledge of their texts, thoughtfully considered the ideas presented in the topic and used language well to present those ideas clearly, scored highly. Many students had prepared thoroughly to write complex and insightful responses to the topics.

Section B – Comparative analysis of texts

It is clear that most students are well aware that this task requires assured knowledge of two of the eight prescribed pairings of texts and a capacity to meaningfully compare ideas and issues, as identified in the two questions on each pairing.

The four assessment criteria require students to demonstrate textual knowledge and the essential ideas and issues as seen in the supportive textual evidence employed, to explore meaningful textual connections – similarities or differences with respect to the topic – and to exhibit apt control of language. Since assessment is holistic, students are rewarded for their capacity to consistently utilise their skills and knowledge in writing a unified essay that directly addresses the selected topic. There is no preferred style of essay writing; rather, students should adopt the approach that most readily enables them to compare the nominated ideas and issues with assurance and consistency.

The two most popular pairings were *The Crucible/Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague* and *Black Diggers/The Longest Memory*, while all eight pairings revealed a spread of marks, from very high to very low. In each topic the word 'compare' unequivocally reminded students that this was the heart of the task. Four of the topics centred around one or two textual quotation(s), while most of the remainder focused on a direct exploration of a single idea, 'Compare how the concept of social responsibility is examined ...', or even contrasting two elements, 'Compare how the two texts represent the difficulties of remembering or forgetting the past'. In each topic, the wording precisely sought to guide students on how to analyse the idea; for instance, topic one on *Black Diggers/The Longest Memory* required students to examine the approach taken by each writer to reveal the issue of conflicting loyalties. Teachers need to ensure that students are familiar with the range of potential question approaches, including a consideration of how the idea or issue is explored in each text.

The most assured responses were able to demonstrate a capacity to use strong textual insights to analyse the essential ideas and issues at the heart of the topic. In such instances, students typically constructed tight introductions and used precise topic sentences, such as 'When change is deemed incapable for a society, a defiance may occur where rebellion seems the most successful option.' The capacity to conceptualise is highly valued, as is reflected in the description of the highest range of the published Expected Qualities. In such cases, the textual comparison was crisp and directly connected to the topic. The use of metalanguage was sharp and adept at illuminating meaningful comparisons and contrasts, recognising that textual events and protagonists are effectively vehicles for highlighting ideas and issues. The following extract from a response to topic one on *Tracks/Charlie's Country* reveals such traits.

De Heer and Davidson suggest that in a society riddled with norms and prejudice it is difficult to attain and understand freedom for Charlie. He is controlled by the inherent white paternalism evident in authoritative figures like Luke but also by political interference such as the 2007 Northern Territory Intervention. Because of the ethnocentric views displayed by the white individuals in his community, Charlie is prevented from living the 'old way'. This ethnocentric thinking is depicted when Luke confiscates Charlie's gun, believing that it is a 'weapon', despite Charlie's protest that he is a hunter. Robyn too is restricted by the norms of society and, like Charlie, it is at the hands of the dominant individual, the white male. However, unlike Charlie, it is not because of her ethnicity, but rather her gender. In entering Alice Springs, the danger that Robyn faces being an independent female is established. Robyn is warned that she is to be the 'next town rape case' at the pub where she works. Furthermore, Robyn is restricted from working at the pub due to the danger it poses, when she finds faeces on her bed. Robyn is forced to adapt to her 'biased, bigoted and above all brutal' male dominated society if she wishes to survive...

De Heer and Davidson strongly assert that it is in nature where individuals are truly able to experience freedom. 'Within [her] first day' in the desert, Robyn gains a 'sense of release' and 'buoyant confidence' that she lacked in Alice Springs. In the desert, Robyn is able to rid herself of the social crutches she was previously bound by... Charlie too is able to do things he was previously restricted from in his society. Charlie is able to craft a spear and with it select items from 'nature's supermarket'. Previously, Charlie was prevented from doing this by Luke claiming that after 'what happened in the other town' Charlie's spear posed a threat. Charlie's enthusiasm and happiness at his new found freedom is evident when he cooks the fish. De Heer uses close up angles of Charlie's face that display his evocative eating of the fish... Similarly, Robyn too learns to rely on nature to feed her through meeting Mr Eddie. Through Mr Eddie, Robyn learns that the land is 'benign, bountiful and giving' and additionally develops an understanding of how nature, freedom and identity all fit together. Robyn learns that in the man-made world freedom is lacking and Davidson displays this through the negatively connoted words she uses to describe Alice Springs as 'misogynistic cult' and 'biased and brutal'. In contrast to the positively connoted expressions she uses to describe the desert such as 'free to learn' and 'giving' De Heer highlights the same thing through diegetic sounds. When Charlie is surrounded by nature, de Heer utilises the mellow and dellucent sounds of birds and insects to highlight the tranquillity and freedom in nature. However, when Charlie is in manmade environments such as the prison the noises cease. Davidson and de Heer depict nature as being omnipotent in having the ability to physically and mentally sustain an individual as well as providing the freedom they crave...

Likewise, the following extract in response to topic one on *Photograph 51/The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* concludes with assurance and provides meaningful comparisons. It also successfully focuses conceptually, typically using considered metalanguage.

As both retrospective narratives, The Penelopiad and Photograph 51 illuminate the power of storytelling from the victors of history, largely the men, who have determined the representations of Rosalind and Penelope throughout history. However, through these time-shifting narratives both novels possess the determination to change and explore the truth from both protagonists are ultimately highlighted. Penelope despite existing in a state of "breathlessness" and "helplessness" is nonetheless granted the opportunity by Atwood to "spin [her] own thread". Despite the thousands of years determined to change how she is perceived in front of a modern audience. Adopting casual language, Penelope denigrates the "edifying legend". She has rendered by the authoritative narrative and instead reveals the agency and wit she possesses. Repudiating her role as a "virtue of modesty", Penelope adamantly condemns such a representation that is used to "beat other women with". Throughout her novel, Penelope's determination to reimagine and reinvent history by exposing the "truth" regarding her and her male counterparts such as Odysseus as well as the various rumours that threaten her image demonstrate an immense desire to change and reshape the modern audience's understanding of events. Rosalind also expresses this determination yet has this agency and autonomy on death, as the male characters predominantly recount the events of the "key to life". However, Rosalind does surmount the barrier, as she has the opportunity to expose the

“truth” but more so to herself. Breaking the fourth wall, Rosalind contrasts the assertions made by the men that she is a “restless ghost” and “cold and formal” and instead a vulnerable woman who wanted to “be trusted” and had a steadfast belief and love for science and “overlapping” shapes and nature. Thus, through storytelling and the retrospective narrative, Atwood and Ziegler underline the determination their protagonists possess in changing their representations despite the barriers of death and time.

Both texts endorse and foreground the ways in which Rosalind and Penelope are determined and persist despite the adversity emanating from misogyny and patriarchal worlds. They are both very similar, fostering striking parallels between the ways in which they delineate their determination through patience, self-reliance and storytelling. As they challenge our perceptions and reveal the problems that had to be overcome, Ziegler and Atwood expound that being determined is important in order to survive and gain a voice.

While many students were able to meaningfully and effectively compare the selected pair of texts through the lens of the topic, others could not move beyond an account of the attributes of protagonists, or focusing predominantly on the events in each text. It would seem that some students mistakenly believe that it is prudent or acceptable to memorise significant portions of a response and try to force the topic to link to this unrelated material. Naturally, the exam provides unseen topics, both in Sections B and A, which students must address and ultimately resolve. Thus, the topic ‘Compare how *Tracks* and *Charlie’s Country* present the challenges of living between cultures’ should not be misread as ‘in both texts, the concept of racism is a major theme and challenge in both Robyn and Charlie’s lives’.

Also, students should carefully consider the most appropriate way in which to open their essays so that a pertinent platform for comparative exploration of the central idea is established. Since they are expected to examine a key issue in the pair of texts, this needs to be progressively explored. Opening with imprecision, such as ‘both the novel and the film came with many advantages, disadvantages, similarities and differences’, or with a dictionary definition – ‘freedom the condition of being free or unrestricted is key them explored ...’ – will be unsuccessful, as this does not suffice to outline a complex notion to be further examined.

Therefore, teachers should ensure that their students explore an array of key ideas and issues that are apparent in both their texts for study, and the ways in which these arise. Since ‘meaningful connections, similarities or differences’ are to be considered, close textual analysis is essential.

Section C – Argument and persuasive language

It was evident that students found the material presented in 2019 accessible. This allowed clear entry into the identification and analysis of argument and language use. The two pieces for analysis were firstly, an advertorial written by the manager of a local grocery store, Hailey Astaire, informing local customers that they were adopting a cashless transaction system in the near future, and secondly, a short letter in response to the proposal from Samuel Morricone who was very critical of its effects on local residents. There was a graphic attached to both pieces and most students could identify the connection between the visuals and the written pieces.

This task required students to closely consider the given material, including the visuals, and examine the ways in which argument and language operate together to persuade a target audience to share a specific point of view. While two divergent views were presented with respect to the social impact of cashless transactions, no comparison of these two texts was required. Rather, students were expected to approach each piece in a holistic manner, asking how it persuades its audience through a combination of argument and language.

Most students showed sound comprehension of the material itself and were able to show their understanding of the arguments of both Hailey Astaire and Samuel Morricone; strong, contextual

introductions often reflected this understanding. The best responses identified the overall purpose and intended audiences of the advertorial and letter, and used this as their context to structure their analysis of the key stages of the respective arguments and their purpose in positioning the reader, before closely analysing the particular language and persuasive devices used, as in the following example of a high-scoring response.

The recent increase in the number of cashless stores in society has sparked the perennial debate of whether accepting only credit cards or online forms of payment is a practical advantage or hindrance for customers. In her advertorial published in the local newspaper, entitled 'A Better, Faster Shopping Experience', the manager of Hailey's Local Store, responds to the issue by ardently lauding cashless stores and announcing her decision to no longer accept hard currency at her grocery shop. Targeting her 'valued customers', Astaire amiably argues the benefits of digital technology in an excited and positive tone. In response to the paid advertisement, one of her customers, Samuel Morricone, scathingly debunks Astaire's point of view in a letter to the same newspaper, vehemently arguing the inconvenience and disadvantage of cashless stores.

Students needed to focus on the ways in which each writer structured and sequenced their arguments and carefully used language to persuade their readers. The majority of students could identify and describe the major arguments used by both writers but often had difficulty **analysing** them. There were many lengthy descriptions of the extent to which Hailey valued her customers, supported by many quotations from the advertorial; however, taking the next step to analyse **how** this argument functioned was a challenge for many students. The following sample from a high-scoring response analyses how language and argument complement each other to persuade an audience.

Astaire's tone becomes more academic and professional as she positions the phasing out of cash within a wider economic context while maintaining the customer-centric mantra of her business. Her use of the warm, positively-connotated verb 'embraced' exudes a sense of support for cashless systems by the wider Australian public. Furthermore, it links to her argument for safety being at the forefront of technological change. By citing Phillip Lowe's foreshadowing of a 'turning point' along with her description of the store as a 'leader' further elevates the store as proactive and progressive in its operation, always seeking to provide the customer with the most modern experience. However, she also ensures that whilst modernising, the store remains grounded in its role as a heart of the local community. By alluding to 'recent pickpocketing' in the area the store is depicted as simultaneously modernising, while protecting the authentic, genuine way of life which has defined the local community.

Some responses were hampered by efforts to integrate the analysis of the two pieces. Students became so focused on trying to address the two articles side by side that they lost control of the analysis, and the response fell into 'he-said-she-said' description. Some students adopted an awkward 'compare and contrast' paragraph structure for their response, which mostly resulted in repetition, paraphrase and general confusion. Students cannot successfully understand the development of individual arguments if they are constantly trying to compare and contrast the two authors. While two divergent views were presented with respect to the social impact of cashless transactions, no comparison of these two texts was required. Certainly there were some students who had mastered this challenging approach, as shown in the example below, but generally separate analysis of individual articles was much more effective for students.

Having established his right to speak on behalf of the customers of Hailey's Local Store with the phrase 'where I shop', Morricone derides Hailey's advertorial as 'dishonest' and almost condescending of her customers. The use of exasperated, colloquial language – 'can I just say: who is she kidding?' – accuses Astaire of disrespecting her customers by assuming they would not understand the commercial motivation behind the abolition of cash payments. His depiction of hard cash as not outdated but rather 'old fashioned', reinforces the choice as simpler and more familiar to loyal customers. This is juxtaposed with the illustration of the card reader which seeks to invoke scepticism in the reader of how easy the change will actually be. The myriad of

buttons presents the technology as complicated, while the 'ERROR' message evinces a lack of reliability. By including the story of his elderly mother, Morricone frames Astaire's decision as inconsiderate. The language 'she relies on cash' and 'withdraws the cash she needs' contrasts sharply with Astaire's dismissal of such concerns, and reinforces his argument that cash is a necessity to the most vulnerable in the local community.

Students were very confident in their quotation of language. They chose appropriate words and phrases, instinctively knowing that they were impacting the argument in some way. Again, it was the analytical step against which they stumbled. Why did the author choose to use this particular language? What impact was he or she seeking to have on the audience?

There is still some uncertainty about tone. Suggestions were offered that the writers were 'autocratic', 'pontificating', 'excoriating' or 'jubilant' – even a 'gaiety tone' was offered. Students need regular exposure to different forms of argument and the variations of tone and voice utilised by writers and speakers. More often than not, simple, accurate descriptors of tone and tone shifts can work very well.

Higher-scoring responses showed that students understood the impact of words, appreciated nuance, and showed sensitivity to subtlety and, most importantly, tone. Their capacity to comment on language use **in context** was also strong. They wrote with an understanding of the purpose of an advertorial and the role of the Community Voice section in the local newspaper. Lastly, they offered precise support for the assertions and observation they made and yet held a sense of overview and context, as seen in the following example of a high-scoring response.

As her tone shifts to enthusiasm in anticipation of the future, Astaire argues that the decision to go cashless is both easier and safer, and will be a part of the trend in Australia of 'embrac[ing] the digital economy'. Using an inclusive voice, Astaire speaks from experience as she reassures readers that 'most of our customers don't pay cash for their goods now' drawing readers' attention away from the nature of the article as a paid advertisement, and further emphasising that the change will not be a disruption. Appealing to her readers' trust of expert authorities, Astaire uses the Governor of the Reserve Bank's opinion that 'cash is set to become a rarity' to encourage her audience to believe this is an official prediction of the future. Drawing a parallel between the Governor's words and her own decision to go cashless, Astaire establishes her store as a 'leader in the community' in order to challenge her customers to accept the responsibility of supporting the store's changes. Through employing an optimistic and enthusiastic description of the digital future, Astaire simultaneously emphasises the strong initiative and independence reflected in the store's decision – something her customers can share with pride.

Students are expected to acknowledge and explore the way visual features were used in adding persuasiveness to the entire piece; there were very few students who did not try to work with the visual material. There is no expectation that students should write lengthy paragraphs on the graphics; in fact, the shorter, sharper reference often works more effectively, and those who can integrate the analysis of the visual into the broader argument show greater mastery of the task, as seen in the following example of a high-scoring response.

Initiating her advertorial in a pleasant and cheerful voice, Astaire demonstrates her store's attributes in a listing of services offered, in the 'healthy meals, many specials, locally sourced food', and how they 'abolished plastic carry bags ... long before the big stores'. In this, Astaire appeals to those in her audience that have strong communal values, as the author attempts to prompt readers to recognise that Hailey's Local Store is an integral part of their town. This is further demonstrated in the imagery Astaire incorporated into her photograph of a man in a suit shaking the hand of a smiling grocer in front of a display of fresh produce. The juxtaposition of the man's tailored suit and the woman's plain shirt and apron attempts to paint her in an unembellished and trustworthy light to readers. The simplicity of her uniform is orchestrated to make her seem friendly and a part of the local community, not one of the 'big stores'.

This year, many students revealed an ill-informed understanding of the terms ‘ethos’, ‘logos’ and ‘pathos’, assuming that the mere mention of these Aristotelian argument terms would add value to their response. Simply labelling arguments with these terms is no better than merely listing language techniques such as rhetorical questions, inclusive language, anecdotes, and so on. Identification is only the first step – students need to analyse how and why the argument is being developed in this way, and what persuasive impact on the audience is intended.

The nature of the 2019 material enabled nearly all students to respond to the task, and even the students who did not score highly found some argument and language use that impacted on the reader. Simplistic listings of persuasive techniques are slowly disappearing. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement and students should be encouraged to be more specific in their analyses. Too many students offered a general discussion rather than analysing specific impact on the audience. Comments such as ‘grab the readers’ attention’ or ‘to get the reader interested’ are too generalised and vague.

Like other sections of the paper, there were no expected responses. Assessors were looking for the skills that allow students to demonstrate their understanding of how the argument develops and functions, and how language is used to persuade. Students could achieve full marks yet select different parts of the material to exemplify and explore language use.

The highest-scoring responses deliberately set out to explore and analyse the way argument and language were used to persuade the local supermarket customers. These students were often able to offer insights into the construction of the advertorial and the way in which the readers’ ideas were being directed. Students who scored highly showed the capacity to choose language examples precisely and show how they contributed to the persuasive effect of the broader argument.

Text selection and average scores

The table on the following page shows the Section A texts selected by students in 2019 and the average Section A scores achieved by those students, shown as a percentage of the possible marks. The table also shows the average scores achieved by the same students for Sections B and C, again shown as a percentage of the possible marks for each of those sections.

Text selection from Section A of the 2019 English examination and average scores for Sections A, B and C

Section A Text	% of students	% Average score Section A	% Average score Section B	% Average score Section C
<i>After Darkness</i>	4	52	49	51
<i>All The Light We Cannot See</i>	2	61	59	57
<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i>	1	57	53	52
<i>Extinction</i>	5	52	51	51
<i>Frankenstein</i>	11	60	58	58
<i>In Cold Blood</i>	3	53	52	53
<i>Island: Collected Stories</i>	2	59	56	55
<i>Like a House on Fire</i>	4	52	49	51
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	4	70	66	62
<i>Nine Days</i>	4	48	48	50
<i>Old/New World: New & Selected Poems</i>	2	53	46	49
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i>	2	56	57	55
<i>Rear Window</i>	24	51	51	52
<i>Selected Poems</i>	2	70	66	63
<i>Station Eleven</i>	8	58	53	54
<i>Stories We Tell</i>	0.4	50	46	44
<i>The Golden Age</i>	7	49	49	50
<i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i>	0.6	70	62	62
<i>The Lieutenant</i>	5	54	51	52
<i>The Women of Troy</i>	9	53	55	54
No text selected	1	0	23	36