

2015 VCE English as an Additional Language (EAL) examination report

General comments

The 2015 English as an Additional Language (EAL) examination paper consisted of three sections: Section A required a response to one text, Section B required a response to a prompt related to a selected Context and Section C required completion of two tasks in response to unseen material.

Assessment was holistic, using the published assessment criteria. Assessors relate student performance directly to these criteria, and their judgments are assisted by the use of a set of descriptors. Teachers and students should be aware of the assessment criteria, the descriptors and the sample examination paper, which are published on the VCAA website.

Specific information

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

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Text response

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	2	7	14	21	22	17	10	5	1	5.8

Students were required to produce one piece of analytical or expository writing in response to one text. There were two topics for each of the 20 prescribed texts. The descriptors used for assessment relate to knowledge of the text, including consideration of its concepts and construction, the structure and relevance of the response, and writing skills – the control of the conventions of written English.

The most popular texts and their percentage average scores are shown in the table below.

Text	% of students	Average score
<i>Medea</i>	17	5.7
<i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i>	14	5.9
<i>Mabo</i>	12	5.4
<i>All About Eve</i>	11	6.0
<i>In the Country of Men</i>	10	5.7

The highest-scoring responses demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the topics and texts through an ability to craft meaningful, analytical and relevant discussion in direct response to the chosen question. High-scoring responses were able to skilfully weave knowledge of the text into the fabric of the analysis. Student writing generally reflected awareness of the construction and interpretation of texts, but the less sophisticated responses focused on the plot. Almost all responses displayed at least some knowledge of the text and an adequate knowledge of essay structure.

High-scoring responses were characterised by a sharp focus on the key words in the topics, selective and considered use of the text, and ideas expressed with strong language skills. Low-scoring responses tended to be more descriptive and dominated by detailed retelling of the content of the text rather than selective use of the text. Students generally showed a good understanding and knowledge of the texts and were familiar with the main ideas raised in the questions. There were few very short or incomprehensible responses. In planning, students need to brainstorm all the key words in the question, paying particular attention to modifying words and comparatives within the question. A well-planned response is less likely to slip into retelling the story or adapting a previously written response to fit the question. Students need to be able to explore how texts are constructed and the effects of the writer's choices in developing a narrative.

As in past years the majority of responses were on a small number of texts. The most popular texts included a variety of genres. The following five texts were used in 64 per cent of the responses: *Medea*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Mabo*, *All About Eve* and *In the Country of Men*.

Both questions on *All About Eve* offered students sufficient scope for strong writing. Insightful responses showed very thorough knowledge of the text, in particular an ability to write well about the concepts and construction of the film. Some responses to the first topic displayed a limited understanding of 'roles' women **must** play and simply focused on the behaviour of women in the film. These responses also tended to comprise more retelling than analysis. The second topic was well handled by students who developed a clear contention and line of argument by responding to the key words 'ultimately' and 'triumphs'.

The questions on *The Thing Around Your Neck* offered students the opportunity to link ideas related to the questions across a range of short stories from the text, and high-scoring responses were able to do this. Both topics were broad and covered major themes within the text. High-scoring responses used these terms to define a focus for the writing and supported this with an appropriate selection of stories.

The *Medea* topics also covered major themes within the text and were broad enough to require students to be selective about the material they incorporated into their responses. High-scoring responses contained interesting analyses and commentaries about Corinthian society and Medea's psychological state. In responses to the second topic, many students identified more than one villain and were able to use the text effectively to develop their points of view. There were some more basic responses to the first topic, as some students were not clear about the meaning of 'extremes of human emotion'. Others were able to use this idea to structure responses that did more than simply summarise the whole play or include lots of additional background information.

The first topic on *Brooklyn* was a more popular choice than the second. Students understood 'new beginnings' but did not always address the challenge of new beginnings. The topic required students to look at a range of characters and situations in the novel, not just Eilis Lacey. The terms 'are challenged' and 'are damaged' invited students to ask 'In what ways? How? Why?', but some students simply retold the breakdown of relationships in the text.

In responses to the first topic on *No Sugar* students used a number of different angles to discuss 'what it meant to be Aboriginal in the 1930s in Western Australia.' This was the more popular topic.

Some responses on this topic explored how a specific tribe, a specific family and a specific event were used to offer insights. Other responses were more historical than analytical, without close links to the text.

During their preparation, students need to consider how construction, language and authors'/directors' choices add meaning to the text, rather than merely looking at what happened, the themes and the characters. The importance of integrating text construction and authorial choices into responses needs to be emphasised, as well as discussion of characters or themes. Language is the key. Students need to write analytically, not descriptively, and need to develop writing skills that will enable them to incorporate knowledge of the text into their analysis or exposition. Analytical writing involves critical examination of the proposition in the question, providing evidence to support the position taken in response to the question. The task for Section A was to complete a piece of analytical/expository writing. Writing that simply describes/tells what a character did rather than exploring why, how and the effect of the behaviour relevant to the set question is a limited response. Students should be encouraged to explore questions fully by unpacking topics to allow their own ideas to emerge. Thoughtful planning is needed to craft a response that directly addresses the set topic. With collections of stories, students should be encouraged to look for the links and connections between the stories. Further improvement is also needed on how to construct a response to questions that ask 'to what extent'.

Student response – Example 1

The following upper-range response to *Medea* explores the 'extremes' of human emotion in the text. It uses the text selectively and incorporates short quotes to respond to the implications of the topic. Consideration of the construction of the text and the world in which it is set also form part of this response.

'Medea is about extremes of human emotion.' Discuss.

Hell has no fury like a woman scorned. Euripides' Medea explores the way both the head and heart define a human being and human relationships and underlines the consequences when one is devalued or dominant. Medea and Jason each embodies passion and reason in excessive amounts. The foreign princess loves and hates with great strength, her once passionate love turns into furious hatred when Jason betrayed their marriage oath for his ambition. Euripides suggests men and women are both emotional and the safest way of living is in moderation, a balance of both emotion and reason.

Medea's "passion is master of [her] reason, passion that causes the great suffering in the world." She loves and hates with extremity. To win Jason's love, she betrayed her own family, murdered her brother and persuaded Pelia's daughters to kill their own father. She suppressed her pride to take on the submissive role of a royal wife who "seeks to please her husband in all she does." In the first episode, her "anguish", her extreme emotions are fully exposed and are directly contrasted with the Nurse's principle of moderation. Euripides does not support her excessively passionate nature but warns his Athenian audience through the downfall of Jason and Creon's royal family that the world of emotions needs to be respected.

Medea is not mere human, her "noble father is the Sun". As the grand daughter of a god, Medea has an excessive amount of pride and fears the "mockery of [her] enemies". This excessive pride eventually led to the death of her "beloved" children and brought her "a lifetime of sorrow". Her extreme love that turned into extreme hate compounded with her excess pride resulted the tragedy of the play: death of innocent people and the down of Corinth. There is a degree of similarity of what Medea did to her family for the love of Jason and what Jason has done to his family to fulfil his ambition.

Euripides explores not just the capability and danger of excess passion but also the consequences of extreme reason. Jason sees love as a tool to gain success. He is willing to use Medea's power to acquire the golden fleece and his status as a hero. Then disregard her contribution, calling it as "compelled" by the Cryprian, for a political marriage to advance his prosperity. His betrayal and rationalisation is condemned by the voices of true reason, the Nurse and the Chorus, and by the wise king of Athens,

Aegeus. Euripides too condemns this cold way of living with no room or respect for empathy especially for women.

Women at Euripides' time is considered to be emotional and thus less rational and intelligent as men. The ancient Greek valued sophrosyne: self-control and reason above all things. Euripides challenges this ingrained belief; this "ill-repute" and presents the Nurse and Chorus as wise and insightful. They show sympathy for Medea and establish the audience's initial sympathy for her too. The Nurse fear Medea may hatch some "unheard of schemes" and the lives of the children, while Creon and Jason are unable to see past Medea's "honeyed words". The Choral odes raises the moral standards in which the main characters' actions are judged against. They believe Medea's anger is excessive and Jason has been "unjust". They represent the ideal way of life Euripides admires; "moderation", the safest way to not invite "heaven's anger".

Medea is the sole victor, despite triumphing over her enemies, it is far too simplistic to say she is truly happy and passion is superior. The deus ex machina enables Medea to fly away in her dragon-drawn chariot to the safety of Athens. Euripides is not celebrating the triumph of extreme passion over reason which has been fairly represented by Jason and Creon. He suggests the gods are capricious and will not reward pure reason. His ultimate message is reflected in the last words of the choral ode, "for the unexpected, heaven finds a way", always expect the unexpected.

Medea invites the discussion of dangers of excess reason and passion, challenges the position and status of women in the playwright's time. It is not just a play discussing who is right and wrong but a reminder to expect the unexpected. Medea explores the many aspects of human emotions: love, hate, sympathy, fear, desire, anger... Even the most logical person has emotions buried deep within them. One must live with both logic and emotion, "loves to sit by Wisdom's side" and acknowledge an alternative path.

Student response – Example 2

The following mid-range response to *Brooklyn* offers a more than superficial exploration of the challenges of 'new beginnings' in the text. It demonstrates adequate control of language, despite a number of errors that frequently occur in EAL writing, and the errors do not inhibit the meaning. It is organised and relevant, using the text effectively to respond to the topic.

'Many characters in the text are challenged by new beginnings.' Discuss.

Colm Toibin's 'Brooklyn' is an novel that illustrates emotional ... of its characters in the period of 1950s. Many characters does face challenges from new beginning because of their attachment to the security of the old. However, the strength of each of these characters determined whether they pass the test of the new beginning victoriously or they remain stagnant fearing the change.

The most obvious new beginning is faced by Eilis Lacey, the protagonist who was sent off to the unfamiliar Brooklyn, America to make a better life in the 'land of the free and brave' and financially assist her mother and sister who remained in Enniscorthy, Ireland. Eilis felt like 'she was singled out for something she was not prepared for' and was homesick for a while in Brooklyn. Although, she was convinced that she is not prepared for the new beginning, Eilis' dream speaks something else. In her dream, she wanted to be led away from her mother. She feared her mother and avoided her. This dream implies that Eilis sub-consciously desires freedom and independence from the grip of her mother. She didn't realised it though. Eilis finally surpassed this challenge when she was told to do so by her employer at Bartocci department store and when she was enrolled into Brooklyn College.

Like Eilis, her brother Jack went to England for work. Although Jack never wrote anything personal onto his letter to home, Jack confessed to Eilis that he was 'desperate to go home' when he first came to England. He must have gone through a lot during that period but now he seem to enjoy his work and life. He tells Eilis that he 'likes his independence'. After embracing the new beginning, Jack must have lost attachment to the life he led before in Enniscorthy with his family because he said that 'there's nothing there for me' at home. This shows that every moments and people, how dear they may be, would be a memory of past that we can't even remember in detail. The new beginning is the present and welcoming.

Eilis' mother on the other hand had faced so many losses from losing her husband, sons leaving home for work in England, Eilis going to Brooklyn and the final blow of Rose's death. The prospect of living alone

has scared her. Unlike Eilis and Jack, Mrs Lacey's new beginning is presenting the life of loneliness and losses. In order to ward off this change, Mrs Lacey attempted to prolong Eilis' visit by accepting Nancy's wedding invitation even though Eilis is supposed to leave for Brooklyn before that and Eilis was sure that her mother 'didn't misunderstood' anything about the day she was leaving. Mrs Lacey also accepted job offer for Eilis from Davis office on behalf of Eilis without any consultation. However, her attempts failed when Eilis decided to go back to Brooklyn for she is married. Mrs Lacey now had no other choice but to face the challenge of new beginning and hopefully learn to embrace the change optimistically.

Although different characters took different route when confronted with the new beginning, they knew they must accept it and they did. The challenge may have been difficult but its no more.

Section B – Writing in Context

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	1	1	3	9	16	24	22	14	8	3	1	5.4

Students were required to complete an extended written response that was an expository, imaginative or persuasive piece of writing. They were required to base the writing on the ideas in the prompt and draw directly from the selected text studied in the Context. High-scoring students grappled with the implications of the prompt in an intelligent way. They reflected the development of ideas within the Context and conveyed a strong personal voice. Many high-scoring responses were in an expository style, exploring the implications of the prompt through thought-provoking and relevant personal stories, often beginning with an interesting anecdote. Most students were able to write something meaningful, and showed that they had some understanding of the task requirements.

There was a broad range of writing, including reflective and personal pieces as well as creative pieces. In general, high-scoring students drew clearly on key words from the prompts, supporting their responses with relevant details from the selected text and their own lives. They were also able to draw together ideas from different sources and recognise the subtleties implied by the key words of the prompts, for example, 'throughout life' and 'never completely in control'. Low-scoring students' responses tended to be characterised by an attempt to explain the prompt rather than use it as a springboard for a piece of writing. Some low-scoring responses had little or no connection to the prompt or the selected text.

Some responses resembled a text response. These responses began with a short introduction then gave a long analysis of the text and a brief reference to the prompt. Some were written directly to the text without first presenting the ideas that the text illuminated. Students with adequate, but in no way sophisticated, language skills were able to write relevant responses that drew on the chosen text, personal experience and other material. Low-scoring responses began with a standard definition of the Context, without grappling with the prompt or indicating how the task would be approached. High-scoring responses showed that students had used the nominated text quite well as a source of ideas and examples to support their own line of argument or ideas.

The prompts offered much scope for writing and were generally well understood and accessible for EAL students. Even those who struggled to write successfully were able to relate to some of the context issues from their own experiences and use examples beyond the selected text. While some showed a thorough understanding of the implications of the prompts, others did not demonstrate a connection to the ideas in the prompts. High-scoring responses focused on ideas rather than examples, using examples as a platform to unpack and explore ideas. Low-scoring responses didn't build a discussion from an example and lapsed into retelling sections of a story, usually from the selected text. Students who had developed ideas in some detail had also developed a reasonably wide vocabulary around the Context.

The most popular Context was Context 4 – Exploring issues of identity and belonging, and was chosen by 54 per cent of students. ‘An individual’s sense of identity and belonging’ is a subtle idea with a focus on self-perception, and this was recognised by high-scoring students. Students were able to discuss how this changes and analyse factors that lead to change. Average responses were limited to a discussion of changing identities or changes in behaviour, without any link back to the key focus – the sense of who you are. Some students did not consider changes to people’s sense of identity as they aged, despite this being a key idea in all the texts. High-scoring responses drawing on *The Mind of a Thief* or *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* used different characters and aspects of the texts effectively to connect to the prompt.

Context 3 – Encountering conflict was chosen by 37 per cent of students. Most were able to write about beliefs being tested, and high-scoring responses explored the prompt at a deeper level by addressing the strength of beliefs. There was good use of the references to swearing on the Qur’an in *A Separation*, to Rooke’s inner crisis in *The Lieutenant* and to Megan Stack’s reactions to the US bombings. Some students who wrote on *Life of Galileo* spoke about how he recanted, but did not consider how he inwardly remained true to his convictions.

Only 7 per cent of responses were to Context 2 – Whose Reality? and 2 per cent to Context 1 – The Imaginative Landscape. Both prompts were accessible and drew a range of responses that contained appropriate connections to the texts. Some responses to Whose Reality? used the text as an interesting platform from which to explore contemporary examples and global events in a sophisticated way; for example, discussions about the media (*Wag the Dog*, *The Lot: In Words*) and the illusion of Western society’s superficiality.

It is recommended that the Section B response be approached as a writing task and not as a text task. Working with the ideas of the prompt and/or stimulus material should be the focus of this piece of writing. The Context is about exploring ideas and students need lots of classroom practice at teasing out ideas before they tackle the selected text. The text will be a source of ideas to explore later in their study. The reading of texts from the point of view of the ideas rather than the events or examples should be encouraged. In the highest-scoring pieces of writing the text will not dominate. Models of student writing should be used to explore how connections are made between texts, the prompt and/or stimulus material and students’ own experiences. EAL students have some very specific stories to tell about their own experiences and, when used appropriately, these can make a big contribution to developing a personal voice in the writing. This task rewards students who read widely, consider ideas carefully and synthesise them. Students need to build an ‘idea bank’ and an ‘example bank’ from which to draw for this writing. Not every item in the ‘bank’ can be used with a particular prompt or stimulus. Students should be encouraged to keep their own files of material during the year, including keeping reflections in a journal. Teachers could provide students with a number of activities that encourage them to write a variety of pieces in different forms and styles. Choosing to write three short, different pieces for the SAC task is one way of doing this. Imaginative writing where students take on the persona of a character from their chosen text is more appropriate for SAC writing than for the examination, as it can limit the exploration of the prompt and lead to just retelling the story, often poorly. Teachers could also model different ways in which the ideas of the chosen text could be incorporated into a piece of writing.

In both examples below the occasional lack of clarity in expression does not detract from the overall quality of the pieces.

Student response – Example 1

This upper-range response demonstrates how the Section B task draws on very different writing skills from those required for Section A. It is characterised by consideration of the wider implications of ideas from the Context, draws on a range of resources, includes brief personal anecdotes as well as adequate use of the selected text. It uses the prompt effectively as a

springboard for a piece of analytical writing with mostly clear ideas and attempts to engage the reader.

‘An individual’s sense of identity and belonging changes throughout life.’

“Time is the enemy of identity”. Michael Moorcock indicates how our identity is constantly racing against unstoppable time. This demonstrates that our sense of self and sense of belonging is ever changing throughout our lives. As we grow and mature, it is inevitable that we will experience different life stages and play different roles, thus our sense of self and sense of affiliation may change accordingly. In addition, it’s also possible that our self definitions may be remoulded and re established as we gain more connections and more experiences. However, there is a part of our identity that is not malleable and may not change in our life journey.

*Over our life span, it is inevitable that we will come to different life stages and play different roles, thus our self-image and sense of belonging will be different in different situations. For instance, our family is the first “pack” we belong to, which has a significant influence on our searching of identity. We start to learn our self definition and social skills through the support of our parents. However, as we grow and mature, for the first time we realise that we can make our own decisions rather than acting like children sheltered under parents’ wings. Thus, our self-concepts and sense of belonging to our family change as we grow. Likewise, Patti Miller, the author of *The Mind of a Thief* also exemplifies this notion. She firmly believes that a large part of her identity is defined as a mother in her family. Her intimate relationship with her children helps her to gain clear sense of belonging and sense of self. As her children grow and leave her house, her relationship with her children is suddenly severed. The lack of belonging causes her “identity terror”, “whatever glue that held me together had dissolved” she states. Eventually she comes to change her self-definition and gets more connections to her homeland. Similarly, my grandfather has a similar experience of shifting his identity. He often sees himself as the soul supporter to the house. As he retires due to his old age, he finds himself roaming aimlessly around the house. He tries hard to accept his new identity as retired man. Therefore, it is true to say that our sense of identity and belonging changes as we come across the life span.*

*As time goes by, it is possible that our sense of self and belonging can be remoulded since we gain more connections and experiences. This notion can be exemplified by Adam Goodes, an Indigenous Australian AFL player, from the episode *Who do you think you are*. As he discovers and delves into the history of his ancestors, he gets more connections to his ancestral root. As a result, his aboriginality is uncovered. Therefore, our connections to ancestral root may help to string our past and present together to gain a holistic self-definition. Likewise, Wayne in *The Mind of a Thief* greatly illustrates that our sense of identity and belonging evolves as we age. Due to his horrific experience of being sexually abused as a child, Wayne has a “wound that never properly heals”. This has negative impact on his sense of identity as he develops an addiction to drugs and alcohol. As he ages, the call from Wiradjuri group significantly inspired him. By fighting for the Native Title Claim, Wayne strengthens his sense of self and sense of belonging and enhances his self-esteem and self-worth. As he reflects on his experience, “this struggle has reinforced me, not just as a person, but my aboriginality. It brought out my Wiradjuri spirit.” he states. Therefore our connections to different groups and our negative or positive experience, our self-definition and sense of belonging can be re-moulded.*

*However, there is a part of our sense of self and belonging that may be immune from the impact of environments and may not change throughout life. For instance, an aboriginal identity depends on the biological family, the clan, the skin group, the aboriginal group into which an individual is born. This seems to be pre-established before we are born. Wayne in *The Mind of a Thief* belongs to the Wiradjuri group which holds the group members through the aboriginal language but also through the kinship law. Thus, it is true to say our biological sense of self and belonging which is established when we are born may not change throughout life.*

Over our life span, it is inevitable that we will come to different life stages and fulfill different roles, thus our sense of identity and belonging may change accordingly. As we grow and mature, we may gain a considered self-image or a remoulded self-concept through our connections to different groups and our negative and positive experience. However, there may be a part of our identity that will not be influenced by our experience and age, as our biological identity is the identity we are born with.

Student response – Example 2

This upper-range response uses the prompt as a springboard for an imaginative response to Context 3 – Encountering conflict. It is consistent with the ideas and experiences of the character in the selected text.

‘The strength of our beliefs is tested when we encounter conflict.’

Rooke’s speech

Your honour, I stand in this court martial today, to defend my actions of insubordination, because I believe that brutal inhumanity againsts fellow humans, especially those who are powerless, is unacceptable. Moreover, people beliefs can change and be tested during serious conflicts because they find that they have more to lose or feel pressure to obey and they want to have fame and wealth. Hence, I believe that we British have to put aside our arrogance as well as our quest for power to solve the conflicts between us and the natives who have the right to live in peace.

My Lords, violence only causes more conflicts. Indeed, conflicts escalate and intensify if people give up their belief and honour. When Governor Gilbert ordered his men to murder and then chop off the heads of six innocent natives, he crossed the moral boundary of any civilized man. What we did only revealed our false beliefs that we can gain power if we try to oppress the native. We failed the moral test and we give up our beliefs to be a moral country. We British believe that we are part of a “mighty imperial machine” but our aggressive actions in the penal colony only show that we are unfaithful to our belifes and Bible. I believe that “silence in the face of evil is itself evil”, this is why I felt compelled to take a stand and call evil by it’s name because my belief is “to injure any was to damage all” and I don’t want my innocent victims to suffer. I am not a hero, but I will not condemn my soul and cause my conscience to suffer by condoning harm to good people because “I cannot be a part of this wrong”. Thus, we have to stop adopting our false beliefs that oppressing the natives can give us absolute power or the reputation of His Majesty service could be seriously damage. Surely you can see that future will condemn us! Surely you must realise that oppressing the natives will never win their amity and kindness!

My Lords, people’s priorities and morality can change during serious conflicts. Indeed, when people find that they have more to lose or feel pressure to obey, they belifes can change in order to maintain their self-interest. After we lost the American colony, we feel justified in taking another land. However our desire for absolute power caused our lads to change their priorities from showing amity and kindness to creating terror in the natives. We chose the immoral and uncivilized path and revealed our corrupted and brutal beliefs. You honour, “they were not the same as a horse or a good watch,” they have feeling, just like us. Can we blam the natives for fighting to keep their own land? Is it right to kidnap the natives and keep them in shackles just to make them our friends? No friendship works like that. The Bible says that it is wrong to kill, but we break our own belief by oppressing and killing innocent natives. Your honour, we British believe they are “savages” and we even call them “savages” but we forget that “things that equal the same thing are also equal one another”, they want the right to live in their own land, just like us. Hence, I believe that we British have to put aside our prejudice and wrong beliefs that fame, power and wealth is the most valuable things, because these belifes would place us in a worse position, just like what we experienced in the American colony. We failed to build a stable relationship with the indigenous Indians and tried to use force to oppress them because we believe our guns can give us absolute power and “a show of force is required”. However, our conscientious stupidity and sincere ignorant inevitably led to our defeat in the American War of Independence. Hence, I believe, that our superficial beliefs about fame and success is wrong, and we have to communicate with the natives.

It is true that our empire can gain power and silence rebellion by using harsh justice. However, it is foolish to imagine that moral people like me will remain silent and obedient when we see injustice because we believe that conflicts is not the way to solve this issue and our beliefs about what is right and wrong will not change. You can silence my voice, but there will be others like me. Moreover, the power we have in this colony is only transient and our collective burden of guilt would be impossible to remove. Isn’t it better if we can solve this conflict through compromise rather than causing more harm to the natives?

Your honour, I am willing to sacrifice everything to show you that there is a right way and a wrong way to resolve conflicts. If we can put aside our arrogance and anger, I am sure we can solve the danger, chaos and confusion we cause. After all, what is more important than peace?

Section C – Analysis of language use

Part 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	2	6	9	14	18	18	15	11	4	0	5.3

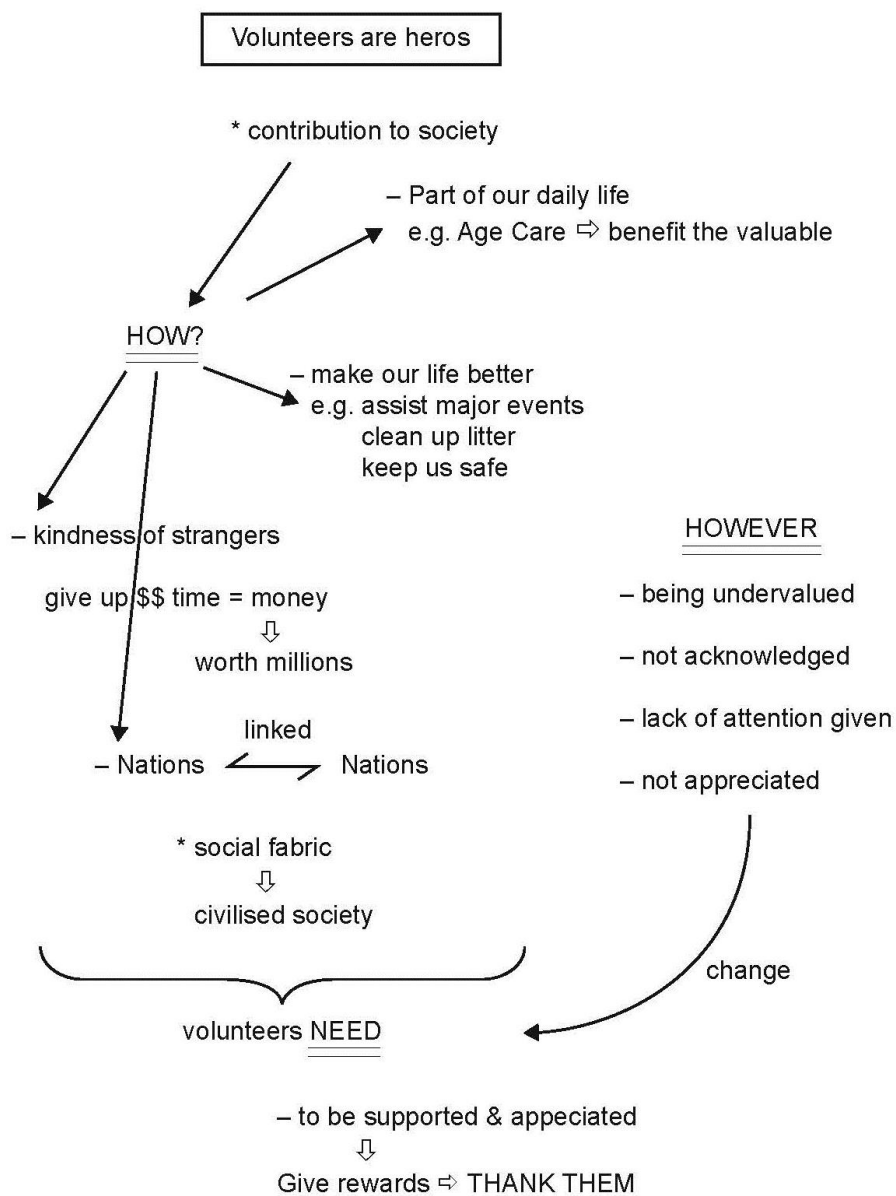
The task material consisted of two pieces about the importance of volunteers. Both were transcripts of speeches made at the presentation of an annual award to an Australian volunteer organisation. The first speech was by the Chief Executive Officer of the sponsoring financial institution. The second was made in reply by a representative of the winning organisation. The material was clear and accessible and gave students much opportunity to comment on at least some aspects of language use and visuals. The topic, language, length and style of the speeches were appropriate for the tasks, and offered opportunities for students at all levels to demonstrate their skills. Television and newspaper journalists were specifically mentioned as part of the audience. Some student responses noted the significance of this and the ways in which the speeches might influence the journalists to report favourably on the work of volunteers and the role of the sponsoring financial institution. Low-scoring students appeared confused about the mixed nature of the audience.

Most students followed the instructions on the exam, which required them to write a note-form summary on the first speech only. A few students wrote a note-form summary of all the material. Students are reminded to read the instructions carefully before attempting the task. The note-form responses demonstrated an awareness of the key ideas in the speech. The first speaker's position was that volunteers should be, but aren't always, valued and appreciated. She sought to gain the audience's support by exploring the ways in which society benefits from the services of volunteers – the economic value of their work, the social value and the national/global benefits of bringing people together. As she explored each of these, the speaker reminded the audience that 'we' often undervalue volunteers.

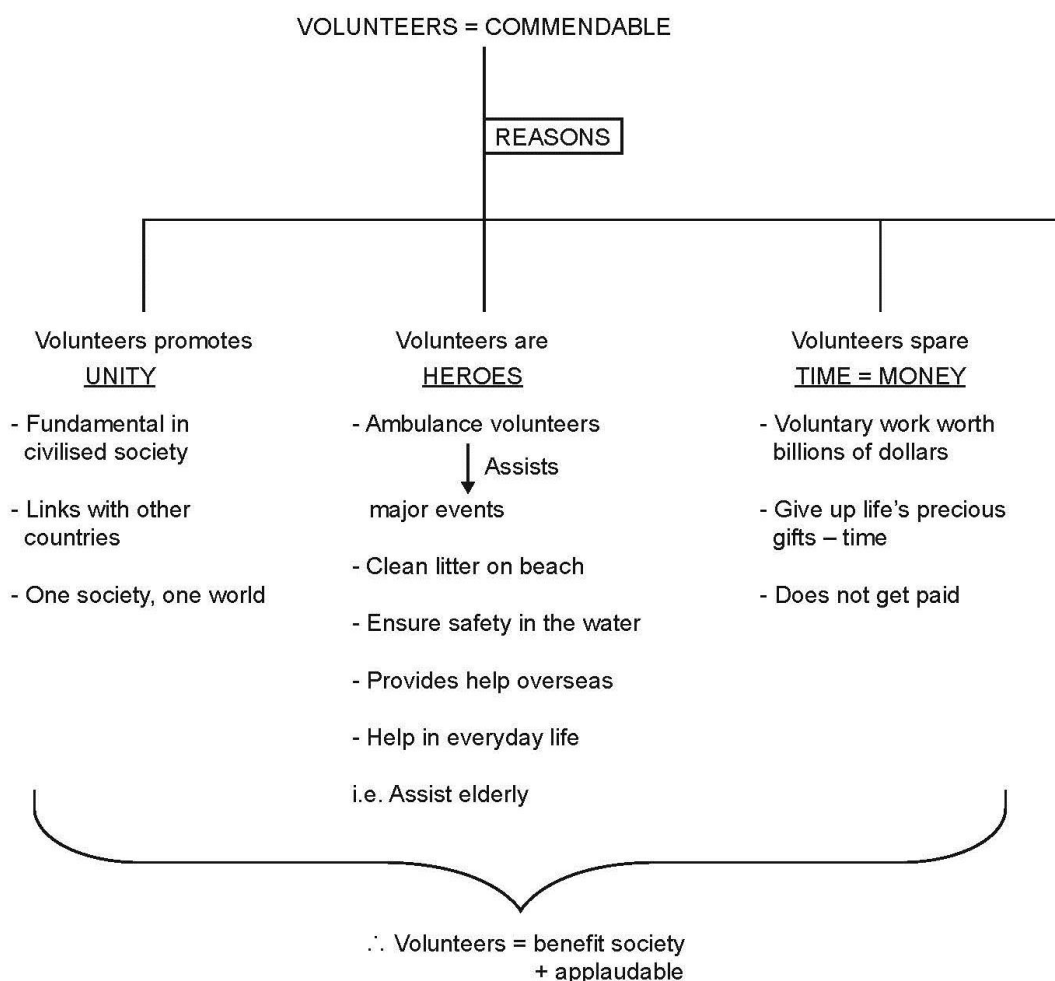
The challenge in this task was to design a structure (for the summary) through which processing of the material could be demonstrated. The summary should have shown how the ideas in the piece related to each other and to the main contention of the material. Many students grouped ideas well, but some simply listed ideas without processing the information. The highest-scoring pieces demonstrated processing of the material, gave an overall understanding of the speaker's position and recorded the ideas appropriately using plain English.

The following student responses demonstrate an overall understanding of the material, processing of the information and selection of the key ideas presented in a meaningful form.

Student response – Example 1



Student response – Example 2



Part 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	3	6	12	18	24	16	10	5	2	0	4.7

In Part 2 students were able to use some or all of the task material to explain how language and visual features were used to attempt to persuade. While some students used three points from the first speech, many used at least one point from the second. Most students made sense of the material and were able to comment on the persuasive techniques. There was potential for students to reflect on the ways in which the second speaker echoed the ideas of the first speaker but few did this. There were also responses that simply worked through the piece, and some responses were structured around the techniques rather than the ideas. Many responses demonstrated a good knowledge of persuasive techniques but not an ability to apply this knowledge effectively to the task material. Low-scoring responses were descriptive rather than analytical. Students need to use words and phrases that recognise what the author is attempting to achieve, not whether the author achieves this.

Most students were able to demonstrate understanding of the messages in the visuals, particularly in the second visual, by making relevant comments. The first visual offered some opportunity to make inferences and comment on emotive appeals. A few students offered interesting and

profound insights, such as ‘the top hand seemed to be rescuing a drowning person’. Others were confused about whether the hands were those of the volunteer and the community or the volunteer and the person receiving assistance. Most students were able to make meaningful observations about the second visual, particularly referring to the multicultural aspect of the photo. High-scoring responses were able to explore the ways in which the visuals connected with the speeches; low-scoring students simply described the pictures.

Upper-range responses were well written and demonstrated a strong understanding of the ways in which language and visual features were used through effective analysis of the material. Features of upper-range responses included:

- a clear understanding of the context and the points of view expressed
- focus on analysis of language, not argument
- an exploration of the implications of specific language choices; for example, silent angel, social fabric
- an ability to use a range of vocabulary
- clear explanations linking visuals to the speaker’s words and exploring the intended effect of the visuals.

Mid-range responses showed awareness of the task but some moved between explaining the material and an attempt at analysing it. Limitations in these responses included:

- difficulty describing tone accurately
- limited understanding of the main idea of the speech
- generalised descriptions of persuasive techniques
- little or no reference to visuals or reference not linked to the text.

Student response – Example 1

This upper-range response demonstrates strong understanding of the task and the material. It examines a range of ways in which words and visuals position the audience. It uses precise language fluently and effectively. The points explored, and the visual, are from the first speech.

In Stephanie Bennett’s speech presenting the 2015 ‘bigsplash’ annual Australian volunteers Award, she passionately advocates for volunteers to be more widely recognised for their contribution to society.

From the outset of her speech, Bennett highlights the roles that volunteers play in our everyday lives. She offers a personal angle as she details how her “own mother” has benefitted from the “helping hands” of these volunteers. Bennett’s experience with these services gives credibility to her speech, convincing her audience that she herself has witnessed the impact that volunteering can make to an elderly person’s day to day life. The audience is likely to agree with her stance that volunteers “are so much a part of everyday life” as they are prompted to recall “the many things (volunteers) do without expecting a reward” from their own experience or through others’. Bennett employs the term “silent angels” to describe the volunteers, which carries connotations of being kind and holy, hinting that volunteers undoubtedly make our lives “better” without asking for recognition. Such a comparison is likely to generate a positive response from the audience, encouraging them to share her belief that the “enormous” contribution should not be overlooked or forgotten. She further reinforces her view by claiming that the bigsplash award “will help to change this situation” of volunteers being undervalued, in doing so emphasising the extent to which volunteering has assisted in our daily lives.

In addition to providing help with day to day activities, Bennett argues that volunteers improve living standards by assisting with events and emergencies both in Australia and overseas. She poses the compelling question, “What would be do without them?” and proceeds to answer her question with descriptions of major events with no ambulance volunteers and “no one....watching to keep us safe in the water.” The image she created is one of helplessness and vulnerability, evoking a sense of loss in the audience as they picture their lives without the assistance of volunteers. Few could remain unmoved as they acknowledge that the work of volunteers are paramount to the success of events as well as the safety of patrons. Furthermore, Bennett offers her audience statistic figures from the website ‘Volunteering Australia’ which reveals that “the total amount of time volunteered by Australians was

estimated to be 713 million hours.” The comprehensive research adds authority to her stance that volunteers’ contribution is “enormous” and deserves recognition for their kindness in a world often “obsessed with money.” As such, the audience is likely to join in her call for citizens worldwide to “thank” these “Australian heroes” for their help with events and emergencies both in Australia and overseas.

At the core of her speech Bennett firmly believes that volunteers deserve to be recognised and this recognition will encourage further volunteering. She emphasises the importance of maintaining unpaid contribution as she claims that volunteering is a “fundamental part of a civilised society.” She utilises the inclusive pronoun “we” to refer to us all as citizens of the Earth, aiming to point out the fact that volunteering brings people from all walks of life together. Appealing to a sense of unity, she gracefully reminds the audience that volunteers “stitches together the social fabric of our nation” and creates a bond between nations around the world. Such an array could not fail to affect her listeners as they reflect on the impact that volunteering has on earth, the one society and world that we are all part of. The accompanying visual which depicts two hands holding another with the words ‘Giving back to the volunteers of Australia’ reaffirms Bennett’s stance that volunteering unites humans together and thus the act of kindness through volunteering needs to be valued so that as citizens of earth we can work together to create a better society.

Student response – Example 2

This mid-range response demonstrates some understanding of how language and visuals are used to persuade. It is an organised and supported response that contains an overall understanding of the material. It adequately conveys meaning and attempts to link the visual with the words, despite limitations in expression.

Stephanie Bennett, the Chief Executive Officer of bigsplash has states that many Australian are willing to help others and become volunteers. She uses statistic from ‘Volunteering Australia’ to shows how many people are involved. The audience will believe as she uses statistic. She also state that ‘quarter of.....populations’ ‘713 million hour’ to show it is a huge number of people were involved in volunteers. She uses number to gets the attention from audience that there are many of volunteer that willing to help. She wants the audience to believe more and more people are participate. She uses very positive words such as ‘kindness’ ‘silent angels’ to shows that she is pleased by their giving. It makes the audience to feel volunteers are great and positive. The image of two hands that hold together has shows the relationship between volunteers and our, that we are connected. It shows a really positive emotion to the audience that would make them feel it is great to being a volunteer.

She also states that volunteer has bring lot of benefits to our society. She uses repetition of ‘no-one’ to highlight what the volunteer had done for society. It makes the audience feel it is important to have volunteer in our society. She uses her experience that her mother has benefitted from their services. It shows her connection with volunteers that she want to thank to. It also makes the audience to understand how volunteer had help many different family. She also list out what these volunteers has helps the elder so people will know how these volunteers had helps society and how many things they’ve done. It makes the audience to think the contribution they give.

Finally, another speaker Mathew Nguyen had states that volunteers also benefits from giving. He uses question to shows that volunteers are happier than other people. He wants the audience to understand it is true. He answered the question by uses researches, so people will believe him because it is reliable. The audience will feel volunteer is positive that can bring happiness.

Examining and analysing model answers could assist students in understanding the requirements of the tasks in Section C. They should practise note-form responses with shorter one-sided pieces. Students need skills in presenting their notes in a variety of ways. In particular, they need strategies for processing material that has only one point of view. Even when the material can be used for a neat division of points into advantage/disadvantage or yes/no, the notes still need to be framed under the overall contention of the piece. These skills are developed through practice and could be connected to other areas of study; for example, using material related to the Context study and practised from early in the year. EAL students in mainstream classes need specific teaching towards developing these skills, with a focus on understanding the material as a whole, as well as how to structure notes. Understanding the material starts with being able to identify the

writer's main contention, then being able to identify how each paragraph contributes to this – looking for the links across the material. Building these skills needs practice throughout the year.

Short letters from the media, especially those accompanied by a visual, that present only one point of argument using several persuasive strategies are a useful starting point for Part 2. Generic explanations of language devices are insufficient. Knowledge of a writer's possible tactics must be applied directly to the unseen passage. Set language stems will only help if there is understanding of the task material. Students do not need to be able to label persuasive language; they need to write about how it attempts to persuade and to identify subtleties in language choices. Students should focus on specific words and phrases, and fully explore their connotations within the piece.

The background information given on the examination paper provided the context for the task material. It is important to read and understand this information before attempting the task. Using language to persuade has an 'audience focus' and the analysis needs to be related to the specified audience. Introductions should be limited to showing an awareness of the audience, the context and the overall contention of the piece. The topic sentence of each following paragraph should identify the point of argument on which the language analysis will focus, rather than the technique being used.