

Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression

Report on the March 2009 examination

There were six candidates, of whom four were from the United States and two from Australia. All gained the Certificate, one at the upper B level, two at the middle B, two at the lower B, and one at the upper C.

My present intention is to have the last five pairs of past exam papers and related reports on our website (www.vicnet.net.au/~learnfld). It is obviously valuable to study that set. Prospective candidates and others are welcome to request earlier papers from the forty-four that have been set since September 1987, for many of which there are corresponding reports. Information about books cited here, and about our marking system, substantially repeated from the last report, appears below.*

I am grateful to my three colleagues in the marking of scripts, Prof. Jack Gregory, Dr John Williams and Mrs Sandra Wyatt.

Section 1

The highest mark of the six was BA. The next was B?+, and there were two Bs (in the middle of the B range), one B?- and one B--. Here is a version in which errors have been corrected.

- a) Ultimately, however, it is the role of companies, not governments, to take the day-to-day risks.
- b) Such a training group, including three whole teams, would have been almost unimaginable when the club began.
- c) Before the operation, she had to brace herself to confront the fact that she might not see out the year.

* There are references in this report to the two books mentioned in the green leaflet concerning the exam, my own *Making up Sentences* (of which copies are available from Learningguild; there will be slight revision for a third edition) and the Penguin Reference book *The Complete Plain Words* (3rd edition, 1987, but originally by Sir Ernest Gowers, and so I write just 'Gowers'). Another book mentioned is R.W.Burchfield's *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, 1996.

Our marking system may be described as follows. Marks in the A grade go from the very rare A and A?- down to A--- and AB. Upper Bs range down from BA and B+++ to B?+, and then, after B unqualified (a middle B), there are lower Bs from B?- to B-- and BC. There is a matching set of C marks, except that the lowest is C--. Fail marks are 'Just below C' and 'Below C'. One advantage of this traditional marking system is that it does not tempt markers to strike a simple average when what is most desirable is judgment of a kind that recognizes merit shown anywhere.

- d) Coaches run from Melbourne to Mansfield: the single fare is about \$28 and the journey takes three hours.
- e) In contrast with previous failures by his team-mates, the Australian captain took the catch.
- f) In this fringe-lending market, borrowers tend to develop a personal relationship with their lender and to depend on him or her.
- g) Half of all colleges and universities are planning to make fewer hires [OR: appointments], often far fewer.
- h) Correct.
- i) Peter Siddle made an impression today, just as he always does.
- j) Mr Ross's son, commonly nicknamed "Our Star", made it clear that he was not going to discuss any forecasts of the future of the business.
- k) There is a double barrier to including generic skills in the timetable: agreeing on how to define them and how to assess them.
- l) That pair of seven-year-olds were virtually inseparable.

a) One candidate left 'roll' uncorrected and deleted 'however' (around which, here, a pair of commas is needed). Another made the unnecessarily large change to 'job' (perhaps dodging the issue of spelling) and deleted the second 'the'. As specified, no **unnecessary** changes, and hence no unnecessary deletions, should be made in this section: the work is similar to what one might usefully and tactfully do on the request of a colleague who asked one to comment on a draft he or she had written. Genuine errors and awkward wordings must be pointed out, but the task is not, usually, to say what one might have said oneself.

Why 'the day-to-day risks'? The implication is that such risks, rather than being occasional and readily avoidable, are to be expected in business, where ventures must often be begun without assurance of success. There is a hyphen because 'day-to-day' is here an adjective with the noun 'risks' (*MS* 2:1.5; 'hyphen' in Gowers's chapter on punctuation). One candidate replaced 'day to day' by 'daily', but it is not that such risks arise every day, but that there is nothing extraordinary about their arising.

b) 'Begun' is the past participle, not the past simple. Better to keep that verb, in the right form, than to change to 'started' or 'was created'. 'With ... -ing' constructions are increasingly common but cumbersome. It is much better here to use 'including' directly after 'group'. The adjective 'unthought-of', like 'unheard-of', requires its hyphen, but the idea of something far exceeding original expectations is better expressed, particularly given the use of 'almost', by 'unimaginable'. Two candidates turned to 'unthinkable' (on which Burchfield has a good entry): in this context it is too strong, suggesting that so large a training group would have been regarded as impossible.

c) 'Brace oneself for' is used of preparing oneself for something in the future. In this case the woman had to face or confront a fact: that she might not see out the year.

(I do not now think, as I did at first, that ‘fact’ should be replaced by ‘possibility’: one could say ‘possibility that she would not ...’, and that could be preceded by ‘brace herself for’ if ‘possibility’ is taken to mean ‘possible situation’.) Sequence of tenses (*MS* 3:7.10) requires ‘might’ in the subordinate clause because ‘had’, past simple, is the backbone verb. Two candidates said the sentence was correct, and two more left ‘may’ uncorrected.

d) People travel, coaches run. ‘Which’ needs an antecedent such as ‘the journey’ rather than the expression ‘one way’. ‘For about \$28 one way’ is here, after ‘Coaches travel’, an awkwardly casual form of expression: better to write of the single fare.

e) ‘Like’ and ‘unlike’ are prepositions (as well as adjectives) which should be used to compare (or contrast) comparables; a set of events called previous failures cannot be compared with a person who is the Australian captain. (*MS* 5:3.4; Gowers Ch. 10, p.104; Burchfield on ‘unlike’. Burchfield has a long and valuable article on ‘like’. I am less willing than he to regard as possibly acceptable in written English some of the uses he notes. I think that he would have regarded the use of ‘Unlike’ in sentence e as “really lazy”.) Two candidates wrote ‘Correct’ and three others left ‘unlike’ uncorrected. The sixth, the person who fared best in this section (and also, unsurprisingly, in the exam), did well in writing “The Australian captain completed the catch, succeeding where his team-mates had previously failed”, even if the change from ‘took’ was unnecessary and ‘previously’ is redundant after the past perfect ‘had failed’.

f) ‘Grow’ can be transitive, as in ‘grow carrots’ and ‘grow a beard’, and now many people speak of growing a business, where it is arguable that ‘expand’ is preferable. Here ‘develop’ is the apt word. ‘Relationship’ does not fit the preposition ‘on’ (*MS* 2:3.8).

g) ‘Hires’ is common in the US, but ‘appointments’ would be used in the UK and Australia in talk about the filling of positions in educational institutions. In those countries ‘hire’ is not used at all as an NC, a noun for something countable (*MS* 1:5.6). In noting its use in the US, and therefore requiring no change to it here, I may still regret that use, as I regret talk anywhere of “the education industry”. Such language can incline us to think of human beings as mere means rather than as cooperating ends in themselves. ‘Many fewer’ sounds odd: ‘far fewer’ does not.

h) The colon is quite acceptable here, as an explanation of why something is not rightly called esoteric. Neither a comma nor a semi-colon would be quite right.

i) ‘Just as he always does’ is to be preferred to ‘just like always’. ‘Always’ is normally an adverb, and therefore does not properly follow the preposition ‘like’ (see e above). The placing of most adverbs, such as ‘today’ here, between a verb and its object-locution is awkward. Peter Siddle is an Australian cricketer, a bowler.

j) The putting of an apostrophe alone after ‘Ross’ and ‘business’ is inadequate, as is suggested by the fact that in conversation we would add the ‘iz’ sound to indicate possession (*MS* 5:3.12; Gowers Ch. 14, ‘Apostrophe’). However, ‘the future of the business’ is to be preferred to ‘the business’s future’: see the excellent entry headed **’s and of-possessive** in Burchfield. ‘Discuss’, unlike ‘talk’, is used transitively (*MS* 3:3.1).

k) Every candidate rejected the inadequate comma here and the absurdly used colon. All but one saw the need for parallelism (*MS 5:3.5*) in the expression of the two difficulties. Almost certainly the meaning of the writer was that **getting agreement** on definition and on a mode or modes of assessment was the barrier.

l) All candidates rejected the apostrophe after ‘seven-year-olds’, but only two realized the need for ‘inseparable’. It is very useful, in mastering English spelling, to make notes with underlining, and, in revising, to read aloud accordingly: ‘separate’, ‘relevant’, etc. Only three candidates made the necessary change to ‘were’. Gowers, at Ch.12, (i) (a), handles well the question whether to use a singular or a plural verb (or pronoun or adjective) after a collective noun: he gives the examples “A committee was appointed to consider this subject” and “the committee were unable to agree”. It would be correct to say “That pair of seven-year-olds was virtually inseparable from our twins.”

Section 2

Far the best response here was by the candidate who gained B++?+. Only one other mark was in the upper Bs, at B+, and other marks were B-, C+ and, for two candidates, Just below C. Fail marks (Just below C or Below C) are given in this section when at several places what are made sentences are incoherent sets of words or otherwise unsatisfactory as sentences, and/or fail to make sense of a part of the passage.

The passage may be punctuated as follows.

Study is Hard Work, by William H. Armstrong, has plenty of good advice. There is, however, a sentence in it that is badly written. “The three basic tools of education are”, he says, “(1) time, (2) books, and (3) teachers.” ‘Tools’ is inappropriate there: time is a dimension of education, teachers are its guides. Let’s say instead that the main means of education are four: questions, reading or listening and note-making, further thought and revision, and discussion. The first and the last are often neglected. We need to ask “To what questions is this chapter (or this lecturer) giving answers?” and also “Have I sufficient reason to be satisfied with those answers?” and “What other questions need to be raised?” John Stuart Mill warned against relying on experience alone: “There must”, he wrote, “be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted.” In many cases we could replace the word ‘experience’ there by ‘an author’ or ‘a lecturer’.

The best answer revealed a thorough understanding of the passage. Its more serious errors were that it did not punctuate as such the three direct questions, and had ‘one’, ‘two’, and ‘three’, followed in each case by a comma, instead of the bracketed numerals.

Other candidates went wrong in the first of those areas and/or at some of the following points. ‘Tools’, before ‘is’, needed single inverted commas, and so did ‘experience’, ‘an author’ and ‘a lecturer’ at the end of the passage. (It is important to attend to, and keep in mind, any detailed guidance given in the instruction: the words ‘single [inverted commas] for a word or pair of words that is directly written about’ gave such guidance.) On the distinction between using words and writing about them, see *MS* 1:3.2. In the middle of the passage, one needed to distinguish the four means of education: it hardly made sense to say that the means of education were four questions, and no such set of four questions was given. Note-making goes with reading or listening, and revision is better linked to further thought than to discussion. The words ‘he wrote’ at the end of the passage, without a ‘that’ introducing a noun clause (2:4.4), indicate that the words on either side are quoted from Mill, and the use of ‘there’ in the final sentence supports that. Some phrases, such as, in our passage, ‘by William H. Armstrong’ require a pair of commas. In spite of the warning at the end of the instruction, two candidates changed or omitted words in the text. One of them changed ‘is’ to ‘are’ after ‘tools’ and later made the same change, after omitting ‘to’, after ‘what questions’.

Section 3

All marks here were in the lower B area except for one at B. There was one at B-, one at B-?-, two at B--, and one at BC. Let us consider the subsections and then I shall venture to generalize about what is needed if one is to deserve an upper B or an A grade mark for this section.

i. All six candidates chose the word ‘façade’. One’s explanation of a word (as a particular part of speech and as used in a passage) normally needs to provide a synonym or near-synonym, often in two or more words rather than one, but matching the part of speech of the word being explained. This was not done by the person who wrote, even though with some perceptiveness, “‘Façade’ ... means that behind the professional that Kenneth was, there was much more to him than what he reflected.” One might say (and here I draw upon two better answers) that, when the word is used of persons, a façade is an ultimately false front or outward appearance, consciously maintained. Two candidates wrote of the **impression** that Kenneth Brown made (or, as one of them awkwardly said, “gave off”). That word also concerns appearance or manner, but lacks the idea of something contrived. One candidate said, misleadingly, that beneath the façade was “much hatred”: we are told that there was hatred of oppression and injustice. Another wrote ‘principals’ instead of ‘principles’.

To be asked to give one’s own example affords an opportunity to think of something really apt. Perhaps the best was provided in the words “the new girl at school put on the façade of being spoilt and rich, just like the other girls, so that she could fit in”. Another candidate wrote “My mother looked content when she heard of my father’s death.” There the word ‘calm’ was likely to be more appropriate. One person gave no example, and wrote concerning Brown “He put forth the image of an individual who was following the motions without humanism”, where better, though not fully justified by the text, would be “He wore the mask of a person going through the motions without much humanity.”

ii. Here it was essential to draw upon particular words in the two sentences cited, and to think of oneself (more than some candidates did) as if in the position of one who did **not** know what the Savoy was. A good answer would be as follows:

People who are “oppressed or bullied” are often weak and resourceless. Legal Aid is intended to help such people. Brown, speaking before its advent, must have been sad because the Law was only nominally open to all, and so, whatever the Savoy might be thought to be (presumably a place), it too must only nominally have been open to all. Hence it is likely to be a very expensive hotel or resort.

“Kenneth”, one candidate said, “is clearly making a metaphor.” No: similes and metaphors need to be distinguished, and we speak of employing them. ‘Like the Savoy’ is a simile.

iii. “All,” is used to describe all twelve members of a jury’, wrote one candidate awkwardly, but then he made Brown’s point that whereas an individual judge or perhaps one or two jurymen might on the day concerned “be unable to employ impartial judgment”, that would not be the case with the whole body. One could attend more closely to the wording of the question by writing this:

‘All’ serves to emphasize the contrast between the single judge and the twelve members of the jury, who are likely at least to include people who in that particular case behave as “good men and true” should and help their colleagues to join them in reaching a reasonable verdict.

One candidate wrote “a judge might just be having a bad day and might not make the best decision, while not all 12 jury men could have the same problem.” Another seemed concerned with the words ‘good men and true’, rather than focusing on the word ‘all’. He wrote of “a faith”, on Brown’s part, “in his countrymen and country”.

iv. Markers of answers to questions such as this, in an exam where candidates are likely to include non-native speakers, must give credit to reasonable answers that would not be likely to be given by a native speaker brought up in an articulate version of his or her culture. To say “The second metaphor to some extent indicates that judges are the deciders of what is just or unjust if they can be accessed” did not do justice to the word ‘bee’, with its suggestion of something buzzing and so distracting. The first metaphor is used to convey the ideas of grumpiness and so insensitivity on a particular day, the second that of having a particular prejudice that distorts one’s judgment. One candidate, making a common error, wrote ‘effect their judgment’.

v. Here clarity was particularly needed about what was being asked. It was not “In particular kinds of cases, is it better to have the verdict given by a judge or by a jury?” but equivalent to “Are there cases in which it is better that the verdict be given by a judge than by a jury?” Thus one needed to focus on one or more types concerning which that view might be held, if not by oneself then by others, and not on any range of cases one wished (e.g., as with one candidate, those where a sentence of death was at issue). Another candidate said “judges can have discerning expert opinions”: better to say that in some cases, where technical evidence is involved, a judge used to such evidence may be more able than a jury to assess a submission based on it. One might well be dissatisfied with a system in which a jury gives a verdict (as in the original Lindy Chamberlain trial in Australia) without being expected to produce anything in writing to show how its members evaluated the evidence and those who gave it.

However, it is important not to underestimate the role of a judge's summing-up, even though a jury may sometimes (as in that case?) take insufficient heed of it. Credit was given to any answer that showed understanding of the question and made at least a relevant point.

It emerges, then, that in Section 3 (as in 4 and 5) it is especially important to understand and answer the particular questions asked, to use words aptly, and where appropriate to explain them with precision. Of course that takes practice. The practice has immense value not only for developing powers of reasoning and expression but for appreciation of good writing, dealing with problems, and relationships with others.

Section 4

Only one answer gained a mark in the upper B range (B++): there were two at B-- and one each at BC, C and C?-.

I am grateful to my colleague in the marking of this section, Dr John Williams, for his contributions to the composition of this part of the report.

Why did only one answer gain an upper B mark? It was the only one that combined a good response to **i**, critical attention in **ii** to several of Bill's assertions, and an argued advocacy in **iii** of a particular policy.

I accept a small portion of the responsibility for unsatisfactory answers, because neither here nor in Section 3 did I on this occasion specify for any subsections an appropriate range of words, as I have often done before. I shall in future make a point of doing so for at least some subsections. However, the wording of **ii**, including 'with reference to particular paragraphs' and the regular invitation to use the abbreviations 'P1', 'P2', etc., required an evaluation of several parts of the passage. Similarly, in **iii**, the plural noun 'policies' and the question 'how would you support them?' meant that a very short or one-track answer would not suffice.

In preparing to answer questions of the type illustrated by **ii**, the indispensable type in this section, requiring above all identification of particular arguments and evaluation of them, it is obviously valuable to get plenty of practice in doing just that, and if possible to discuss what one wants to say with others. My booklet *Reasoning* (available from Learningguild), which includes Section 4's passage and questions from September 1993 and the report on that section of that exam, would be a good base, and then one could go to other such pairs (attempting one's own answers before studying a report); but it also helps to make a critical study of letters, especially conflicting ones, in a newspaper such as *The Age* in Melbourne, *The Guardian* in Britain or *The Washington Post* in the United States.

i. Since the key words here are 'basic recommendation', and the question of reasons comes later, it was enough to say that Bill recommends that any behavioural changes to be advocated by promoters of community health should be small and undemanding

ones, encouraging both avoidance of extremes of consumption and engagement in moderate exercise.

ii. It will be useful here to print what was written in this subsection of the answer that obtained the best mark (B++) in Section 4 and to comment on its merits and demerits. The writer had given a good answer to **i** and in **iii** put clearly, though one-sidedly, a view of his own that governments should content themselves with ensuring that nutritional information was provided rather than urging upon citizens any behavioural change.

In P1 Bill makes a fair point (one that is unfortunately entrenched [in] a sexist attitude) though it is a sort of a generalization. His use of an average family as a model is a valid suggestion for society at large. He follows this concept up in both P2 and P3 where he addresses how to achieve the means to health (diet and exercise) through his model. By stating that the correct way to promote health is through incremental change and then showing how to create this change in the two critical realms of health Bill effectively argues his point. In P4 and P5 he weakens his argument through a poorly formed implied criticism of doctors and ad hominem attacks on the opposition. These paragraphs reduce his credibility but should P1-3 be isolated his suggestion is supported.

There is here a genuine attempt to focus on particular parts of the passage. P4 and P5 are certainly objectionable, but more needs to be said. Bill wrongly suggests that the term ‘preventive medicine’ involves the absurd supposition that its practitioners claim that it can prevent any and every illness. The term ‘health-fanatic’ is abusive, intended to suggest that those who want to work towards significant change of habits are opposed to barbecues, etc. P2 and P3 are indeed consistent with P1, but that does not mean that “Bill effectively **argues** his point”. (One should beware of the words ‘effective’ and ‘effectively’ when one is evaluating an argument: they can so easily be taken as justified by the consistent and vigorous presentation of an argument rather than through an explanation of its **cogency**, if it is cogent. The key question is whether an argument is cogent, whether good reasons are given for a conclusion) It is likely that for some people (e.g. obese children) only a drastic reduction in their intake of fat and sugar, and a considerable increase in exercise, will meet their need. In allowing himself the “nudging” words ‘Every wife and mother knows’, Bill generalizes that in the face of any situation the only realistic policies are those that involve hardly noticeable change. This is assertion on his part, rather than argument from evidence. His basis is widespread reluctance to change one’s habits: he does not consider whether any influential campaign to improve community health must challenge that reluctance by making clear how serious the consequences of some of those habits are. Taking for granted in P2 and P3 people’s present wants and willingness, he ignores the possibility that, for example, school and youth groups might be influenced towards different ones by a combination of encouragement and warnings. In P4, without argument, he rules out any similar combination on the part of doctors.

Bill would have done better to seek actual experience on which to base his case. He might imaginably, for example, have said, in favour of gradual change, “I know from personal experience that I failed miserably to give up smoking by going ‘cold turkey’, whereas gradually reducing, on a daily basis, the number of cigarettes I smoked enabled me to reach the goal of becoming a non-smoker.” He could have reinforced that by reference to conversations with other ex-smokers.

The candidate quoted uses the words ‘valid’ and ‘concept’ loosely, as is common: it would have been better here to use ‘reasonable’ and ‘point’ respectively. ‘Valid’, in the context of evaluation of arguments, is best kept for those deductive arguments which actually are such that if you accept the premise(s) and don’t accept the conclusion you’re caught in self-contradiction. (See *Reasoning*, pp. 3 and 4, on deductive and non-deductive arguments.) One’s **concept** of x or of an x (where ‘x’ is a place-filler for a descriptive noun or noun phrase) is constituted by what one regards as, either generally or for one’s own part, sufficient and/or necessary conditions for the application of the noun or noun phrase concerned. (Two people may both use the noun phrase ‘moral principle’ and yet have different concepts of a moral principle.) The Latin phrase ‘*ad hominem*’ should be underlined to provide handwriting’s counterpart to italics. To argue *ad hominem*, as Bill does in calling those he’s opposing health-fanatics, is usually to argue by reference to some supposed defect in the behaviour of the opponent as though that in itself discredited his or her case.

One candidate did little more than agree with the view put in P3; others mostly repeated what Bill had said rather than evaluating it. The main guideline for this kind of question in Section 4 is “Consider, with reference to both the passage as a whole and particular parts of it, to what extent, if any, the passage presents a cogent argument in favour of the view advocated.” A similar useful question to ask is “Where, if anywhere, does the writer give good reasons for the view he or she holds or the course he or she proposes?” One also needs to explain **why** a reader or listener should not be convinced by those parts of what is said that one does not regard as sound argument.

iii. Candidates did not appear to realize that this question required all three of specific policies (plural; two would suffice), attention to one’s own city or district, and defence of the proposed policies. Here in Melbourne, for example, influenced by what I have read of the work done in schools by the cookery expert Stephanie Alexander, and my enthusiasm for exercise, my own answer might run as follows, with an appropriate length of just over 100 words.

I would recommend that every school in Melbourne that could find room for them establish both vegetable plots and exercise stations, that all children take timetabled turns at each, and that at weekends parents and other adults, who would often bring children, be invited to bring and buy cuttings, etc., and to walk or run around the school grounds and/or use the exercise stations. My rationale would be the desirability of establishing in children’s minds the normality of growing one’s own food, eating fresh food, and taking regular exercise; and the desirability of involving older people, for their own sake and the children’s, in educational centres that promoted these things.

Many good answers could be imagined, including ones advocating, say, changes in the training of doctors to help them to be better at and keener on counselling for good health, along with firmer guidelines for school and workplace canteens; but they would all address the three requirements of the question.

The educational value of the Learningguild examination, one might say, is that it requires skill, and so training, in both understanding the range of a question and answering it thoroughly, without irrelevance, and in good English. The repeatability of the examination does justice to the fact that adequate training usually requires ongoing practice and testing **for some years** in tasks such as our five sections provide.

Section 5

Four essays gained upper B marks (B++?+, B++, B+?+ and B?+), and there was one B- and one CB.

The two essays with those lower marks were both on topic A. To write on it required **discussion** of the view that there were no sufficient grounds for confidence about the future on the part of someone between 18 and 30, and not an echoing of it, let alone a repetitive echoing. Such a discussion could conceivably end with substantial agreement with the view, though presumably with qualifications concerning people already launched on work for which there would continue to be a great need, e.g., in medicine in rural areas. One of the essays declared the end of the American promise that “with work everything can be achieved”, and held that American history offered no encouragement because “America doesn’t have a shared history” and “two hundred years is not long enough to form appreciable legends”. Given that the type of essay specifically asked for was **balanced**, markers had to regard this one as deficient, and we marked it at B-, though recognizing that it had a certain vigour and that a strong case could be made, especially in March 2009, for rejecting the over-optimistic version of the American dream.

The other essay on A was also one-sided, though it recognized that “difficult time[s] do pass”. It was dominated by the effects in Australia of the global financial crisis, and, while that was understandable, a balanced essay would have taken a wider view and considered what factors could justify at least some confidence by some people about their future. There were misspellings and errors of sentence-construction.

The essay given B?+ was on topic P, in the field of public transport. It was competent and covered a reasonable range, but there was a shortage of specific examples. The writer would do well to cultivate a freshness of style, with vividness, a wider vocabulary, and, sometimes, a lighter touch (gained in part by avoidance of unnecessary repetition).

There was a lively and thoughtful response to topic K, relating training in sport to study (“go hard at it and yet not too hard”). The mark of B++ was especially in recognition of the point that rest is needed in relation to both, so that in the one area muscles may be repaired and strengthened and in the other information synthesized and retained. (Better to say, in the latter case, understanding widened and deepened?) The essay ended with the adage, which the writer attributed to the turtle rather than the tortoise, “Slow and steady wins the race”, but that did not do justice to “go hard at it”. The essay included this revealing and well-written sentence concerning “all-nighters”: “The culture in universities is now that of falling behind in readings and attempting to catch up in a single night, often reading in excess of 1,000 pages in a marathon session.” (One way of counteracting that tendency is to set both essay-topics and exam questions that require a growing ability to analyse and discuss a limited range of quite difficult material, rather than a memory of a larger mass.) The sentence about all-nighters, though providing a good contrast with “Slow and steady ...”, was not sufficiently relevant to topic K, which required attention above all to what “going hard at it” might involve in either field, and what some related dangers might be.

The longstanding set of requirements at the head of Section 5 makes plain what kind of essay we are seeking. That set not only enables candidates to know what some of the major criteria are by which what they write will be assessed, but sums up what most academics and business executives (provided they themselves value what the Greeks called *sōphrosunē*, moderation or balance) would appreciate in an essay or report, along with factual accuracy and clarity and precision of expression. It is not surprising, then, that the two essays given the best marks were particularly strong in relevance to the topic and in a balanced treatment of its constituent parts or aspects, two in each case.

The writer on topic I, whose essay was given B++, wrote about the film *Milk*. It portrayed Harvey Milk, the activist for gay rights. Of him she said:

He mobilized so many individuals and injected passion in them through his speeches and inspiring words so as to create a movement of people from all walks of life and all colors of skin toward fair and just treatment of human beings.

That is well written, though ‘communicated his passion to’ would be better than ‘injected passion in’, and a comma should go before ‘so’ and ‘of’ before ‘all colors’. The writer said that Milk’s refusal to give up in the face of the threats he received had inspired her to believe that one ought not to be discouraged by those who say “What’s the point?” or “You’re not going to get far.”

The essay judged best by the markers was on topic M, and the writer covered a wide range in relation to both parts. He recalled the strictness in his primary school, the satisfaction he had in doing well in four sports, and the learning of Latin, which, though he could not see benefit in it at the time, helped him in secondary school to widen his vocabulary. Then came his first criticism:

Imposing so many rules upon children often has negative effects on their ability to grow and cope with life beyond elementary school.

The environment should have been one of greater friendliness, and the teachers ready to be mentors. In addition to or instead of Latin there needs to be a modern language. Some of the funds spent lavishly on sporting arenas should have gone to classrooms. (He remembered that some students in algebra had to sit on the floor.) In an essay of about 600 words, considerable ground was covered and the reader’s interest maintained.

From the essays as a whole, I take some awkward combinations of words. ‘Fun’ is an overused noun, and should not be used adjectivally, as in ‘a more friendly, and more fun, learning environment’. Why not ‘enjoyable’? ‘Acts as a mentor’ is better than ‘acts as a sort of quasi mentor’. It is wrong to think that a lengthy subject-locution should be followed by a single comma (as distinct from the first of a pair): the comma should be removed from “People in the age range of 18 to 30, can no longer plan a family as once our parents did.” ‘A number of’, followed by a plural noun such as ‘factors’, needs a plural verb. Noting the need for properly formed embedded-question constructions (*MS* 5:3.9), and for an alternative to writing ‘it’ as the pronoun for ‘the child’, I leave readers to correct for themselves the following sentence:

Unfortunately, those factors are mainly material factors such as can we afford to have children, how much will it cost us to have child, provide for it and give it a good education.

‘Like’ and ‘is’ are needed in this set of words:

Generation Y as other generations are concerned with the insecurity in the employment market.

In the sentence

If there was more public transport, there would, hopefully, be less cars on the road,

‘hopefully’ is awkward and adds little, and, since ‘cars’ is plural, ‘less’ should be replaced by ‘fewer’. ‘Oscar nominated’ was used as an adjective: it should have a hyphen. ‘Circumvent’ is used, as is ‘get around’ often, metaphorically: one circumvents or gets around a difficulty, but a driver or traveller would often wish to avoid (not to circumvent) the central business district.

It would be valuable to examine the following list of spelling mistakes made in this section, and where appropriate to add the word, correctly spelt, to one’s own spelling list. (See Section 1 above, at 1.)

bare (for *bear*), *correllates*, *decreashed*, *dilligence*, *especialy*, *idealological*, *independance*, *innundated*, *morgages*, *passangers*, *phased* (for *fazed*), *thought* (for *taught*), *unimeginable*.

Much of the expression in this section was good. It is important to try to leave some time, in an exam as on any other occasion of writing, to check efficiently against any errors one may have made. To avoid errors consistently, one needs to be aware of any to which one is prone, and to know which word, spelling, punctuation or construction is likely to be needed instead, not as a matter of rote learning but with understanding.

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