

Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression

Report on the September 2007 examination

All five candidates were awarded the Certificate, three at the lower B level, one at the upper C, and one at the middle C. This is a commendable overall result given that for none of these five is English the native language.

Our examination is essentially a repeatable one. It invites and stimulates, and its reports guide, further reading, thinking, talking and writing in the vital areas of reasoning and expression. The second column in the green descriptive leaflet well illustrates the value of that. Along with past exam papers and reports, the right path for most students is of the kind suggested by the advice given in the third column of that leaflet. One of the candidates who have gained a lower B in this examination has already got well into *Making up Sentences*, doing the exercises. There is plenty of guidance in Part 3 of the Preface, but I intend to supplement it in the course of 2008 with pages for two eventual booklets: one a guide, to assist people to master the approach they need to take to the exercises, and so gain confidence, and the other a set of answers. They will also provide the further illustration for which a desire has been expressed by one of our five candidates.

To make and take opportunities for some such study almost every week is the surest way to make progress, and similarly with developing one's pronunciation and public speaking. In all three of these areas it is important to have constructive comment, and in written work to engage in the guided self-correction that is explained in the paragraph beginning with the words 'Students will benefit' on page ix of *MS*.

Anyone who doubts the value of doing such reading and exercises might read 6:3 in *MS*, with its conclusion (p.75) that among the "ingredients of excellence in English" are "the sensitive command of a wide range of grammar and vocabulary and the ability to combine similarity and contrast of thought and language". He or she would certainly do well to dip soon into Gowers's famous book, begin to appreciate its examples of unclarity and of clarity, and aim to master as much grammar and vocabulary as is needed to become able to read it all with thorough understanding. An achievement indeed. It is worth noting that one could not write now, in English-speaking countries, that "text-book rules [of grammar] ... are mostly well known and well observed in official writing" (p.3 of the current Penguin edition [1987]; but the remark appeared in Gowers's original version of 1954). To illustrate the interest and value of grammar: 'text-book', with its hyphen, is here an adjective, but a hyphen is out of place when the adverb 'well' precedes the passive participles 'known' and 'observed' used here predicatively as adjectives. See *MS* 2: 1 & 2 on adjectives and adverbs, 3:3.5 on "the passive voice", 3:5.4 on participles, and 2:1.12 on the predicative use of adjectives. The participle 'touched' is used as a predicative adjective in the passage quoted on p.18.

In Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the exam, as will be evident from the corresponding sections of this report, good work requires **understanding of what a particular question asks and calls for, and steady focusing on that**. Such understanding and

focusing is a major need in communication anywhere. (It sometimes requires experience, patience, insight and sensitive enquiry to become clear on what a person is asking and/or really concerned about.) An examination such as ours, along with its related program of wide-ranging development, reveals the value not only of a growing appreciation of principles and details of grammar and reasoning but also of the sustained relevance that understanding and focusing make possible.

Students seeking to benefit from this report are advised to follow the practice recommended in the first paragraph of Part 3 of the Preface to *MS*, putting a tick at the end of each paragraph if it has been thoroughly understood but marking with a question mark in a circle anything not yet understood or accepted, to show that one intends to come back to it and if necessary ask about it.

There are references not only to *MS* and Gowers but also to R.W.Burchfield's excellent book *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage* and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)*.

The marking system we employ was explained as follows in the March 2007 report.

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. Thus three marks in the A grade would get one an overall A if a serious effort had been made, without general disaster, in the other two sections.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by my colleagues Dr John Williams and Professor Jack Gregory in joining me in the marking and annotation of Sections 4 and 5 respectively.

Section 1

There were two B-- marks here, one BC, one C+++ and one C++. Here is a version in which the errors in the original sentences have been corrected.

- a) The age-range of 30-49 is that in which Australians are more likely than in any other to say that their life is out of control.
- b) Some people's health problems are entirely treatable, and after treatment those people can return to the workforce.
- c) They will have to adjust either their life-style or their expectations for retirement.
- d) It's time to ask both the Government and the Opposition what solutions they see [what responses they have] to this looming crisis.

- e) To his reply “So you’re not repelled by anything whatever on TV?” my answer was that my review had defended one particular program.
- f) I knew and accepted that, since this was the final year of my contract, my position would be reviewed.
- g) Generation X is torn between saving for retirement and putting down a deposit on a home.
- h) For people like you and me, such pieces of advice are redundant.
 [‘People such as you and I’ and ‘People such as you and me’ are both defensible: see Burchfield, *such* 3 and 4.]
- i) Correct.
- j) Early childhood education is the “cradle” of democracy: its main task is to prepare children for ethical citizenship.
- k) Some years ago at that university the title of Professor Emeritus was bestowed on him.
- l) One of these new activities in which Mary has been the leader has had a transformative effect on two of the older residents.
 [Alternatively, there could be a pair of commas around the relative clause ‘in which Mary has been the leader’: that clause would then be a commenting one, not one that enabled us to identify the range of new activities concerned.]

“How can I do well, or do better, in this section?” is a crucial question, not only for the section itself but for the writing of well-chosen English in other sections, in one’s work, and in other aspects of one’s life. There are two parts, or at least main parts, to the answer: (i) become well acquainted (partly through sustained study of good textbooks) with the areas and points where people often go wrong, and so become able to avoid errors or to recognize and correct them, as our five candidates were in general not yet sufficiently able to do, and (ii) develop a wide vocabulary, learning to employ what the French call *le mot juste*, the word that expresses your meaning precisely. If you do these things you will also be good at assisting others, rather than having to say something lame and ungeneralizable such as “It doesn’t sound right.”

This time, the explanatory comments will not be made for each sentence in turn, as in the pattern that has been customary in our reports. (Students are, however, advised first to make for themselves a sentence-by-sentence comparison of the original and the version above.) We shall look at many points relevant to this set of sentences, taking them by areas in the order employed not only in the heading to this section but also in *MS*, both in 5:3 and in Appendix A. The writer hopes that readers, even if they have little experience so far of study of these areas, will find in themselves a growing confidence that they are well capable of mastering and applying the principles set out and illustrated here and in a book such as *MS*.

Grammar

Subject-locutions and their personed verbs must make a matching pair (*MS* 1:7.1, 9-14; 3:2), so ‘The ages ... is’ (sentence **a**) and ‘One of these new activities ... have’ (**l**) must be wrong. Personal pronouns (1:6.1-7, 4:2.2) and relative ones (4:2.3-6,8) must have a clear reference and fit into a grammatical sequence: **b** fails that test. ‘Either ... or ...’ (**c**) and ‘between’ (**g**), which needs to be used in the form ‘between X **and** Y’, require parallelism (5:3.5). An “embedded” question must be presented differently from a direct one (5:3.9): **d** has confused the two. A verb in a noun clause (2:4.4) is liable to have to fit a personed verb outside it: ‘has defended’ fails to fit the past simple verb ‘answered’ at **e**. (See 3:7.10 on **sequence**.) Care should be taken to avoid a second ‘that’, as in **f**, in the introduction of a single noun clause. After a preposition, object-locution pronouns are needed, not, as at **h**, a subject-locution one such as ‘I’ (1:6.5; cf. 4:2.9). Some verbs are apt for a given context but must be used “the right way round”: thus degrees and titles are conferred or bestowed (**k**) on persons, but persons cannot be said to be bestowed or conferred with them: they can be awarded to persons and persons can be awarded them. The construction that is now common among journalists and others, combining ‘with’ and a present participle as at **j** (‘with ... being’), is often cumbersome. (On present participles, see 3:5.4.)

Punctuation

Correct, and do not introduce, “interrupting” commas (5:3.10). Commas often need a grammatical justification. A single comma is inappropriate in the middle of a sequence of words with ‘either ... or ...’ (**c**), and even after a long subject-locution such as ‘One of these new activities in which Mary has been the leader’ (**l**). A semi-colon followed by a relative clause, as at **e**, is awkward; in that case the sentence needs to be recast. Colons are normally used before a statement which fills out a previous one, or before lists: there can hardly be any justification for the colon at **g**, where no internal punctuation is needed.

Spelling

Is it *-ible* or *-able* (**b**)? *-ant* or *-ent* (**h**)? *-ance* or *-ence*? A knowledge of Latin is often helpful, but few now have that. There is no alternative to writing down and revising words with these endings that one may in future get wrong. ‘Affect’ (**l**) is not used as a noun except in psychology. The noun ‘effect’ corresponds to the verb ‘affect’. There is an excellent entry in Burchfield at *affect, effect*. (It would be valuable to study a dictionary such as the *OALD* for ‘affect’ and ‘effect’ and all the words cognate with them.)

Use or non-use of apostrophes, capitals and inverted commas

As so often, it is vital to grasp and apply the basic principles. For apostrophes, they are set out at 5:3.12. The possessive *its* (needed at **j**) has no apostrophe; the abbreviation *it’s* (needed at **d**, and short for *it is* or *it has*) has one. For capitals, see 1:4.3 and 5:3.13. They are in place here in the “naming” use of ‘Government’ and ‘Opposition’ at **d**, and in the title ‘Professor Emeritus’ at **k**, but not for what should be the merely descriptive use of ‘university’ in the same sentence. 1:3.2 sets out a consistent differentiation in the use of single and double inverted commas, influenced by the importance in philosophy (and elsewhere!) of making it clear when one is talking about words rather than using or quoting them; but the practice there recommended cannot be said to be standard in other areas. Inverted commas are certainly needed at **e**, and the use of the

word ‘cradle’ at **j** is a kind of quoting use: it’s as though we said ‘as people say’ or ‘so to speak’. Those who would like to go further in their study of these matters are invited to turn to Burchfield’s interesting entries (for inverted commas, see *quotation marks*).

Word-order

Although there are rules here (see 2:2.7 and 5:3.15), reliability in ordering words well comes largely from experience of attentive reading, writing, listening and speaking. ‘He was some years ago awarded the title ...’ or ‘The title ... was some years ago bestowed’ (compare **k**) is cumbersome and perhaps pompous, whereas ‘long ago’ in the place of ‘some years ago’ would not be open to that objection. 5:3.15 has a reference to a good chapter in Gowers; Burchfield, at *word order 2*, has excellent examples of “unintended humour”.

Choice of words

Again this requires wide and discriminating experience, but it is ridiculous that there has been so much neglect, in most secondary syllabuses in the past twenty years, of the kinds of textbooks I have listed at 5:3.16. I would particularly recommend to those who are keen to attain the upper B level or the A grade in the Learningguild examination that they obtain from me chapters from *A Wealth of Words*, mentioned in that paragraph, and that they look up and make notes on words in *MS* (or any similar book they are using, and in newspapers, etc.) with which they are not yet familiar. 5:3.16 itself mentions, quotes or uses some words that are well worth mastering.

In our sentences ‘accepted’ is more apt than ‘agreed’ in **f** (a person employed on a contract would not have the option of not agreeing), the preposition used with ‘contract’ is ‘on’ rather than ‘in’, and ‘reviewed’ is better here than ‘assessed’. ‘Transition’ as a verb at **j** is ugly and suggests an infallible “processing”. There is nothing wrong with using the word ‘advice’ at **h**, but if something plural is wanted in the use of it we need ‘pieces of advice’, for ‘advice’ is an NU, a noun for something uncountable (1:5.6). ‘Ethical’, like ‘moral’, is an awkward word to use of persons: it would go better with ‘citizenship’, to indicate that this kind of citizenship has ethical implications. Every candidate kept ‘elder’, but it has to be replaced by ‘older’. ‘Elder’ as an adjective is normally used of a sibling who is older than his or her other sibling, where there are just two of them: see Burchfield’s entry. One candidate must have had the family association of this adjective in mind: it explains a change of meaning (always unjustifiable in this section) from ‘two of the elder residents’ to ‘two of her elder sisters’!

I have modified the corrected version I gave, in the interim report, of the first sentence, in order to make it entirely clear that it is not being maintained or suggested that Australians are, when they are in a certain age-range, very likely to say that their lives are out of control. The expression ‘more likely than in any other’ is not ambiguous, as ‘most likely’ might be claimed to be. The candidate who put the age-range last wrote a grammatically faultless sentence but incurred ambiguity: “Australians are most likely to say that their life is out of control between the ages of 30 and 49.”

Section 2

This was the section with which candidates had the greatest difficulty. One, who made sense of most of the passage, gained B--; another was given C+++; but three candidates repeatedly produced from the passage what could not be a proper or meaningful sentence and therefore had to be given Below C.

Why is this traditional kind of exercise included in the Learningguild examination? Not because it is traditional, but because it is an excellent **test** and, for those who will practise, **developer** of (i) a flexible and agile intelligence, with its capacity for comprehension; (ii) awareness of what can constitute a properly constructed sentence and what cannot; and (iii) detailed knowledge of punctuation. A writer who possesses all three is indeed likely to write well, if he or she is also concise and has a wide vocabulary aptly employed. The appropriate reaction to failure here is neither despair nor impatience, but study of punctuation (not only in textbooks but also in well-punctuated writing anywhere) and practice both in fairly simple and in relatively difficult exercises of this kind, with some comment from a competent guide.

The passage may be given punctuation etc. as follows.

‘Multicultural’? ‘Polyethnic’? Which is the better adjective to describe our nations? There is something to be said for each. One, derived from Latin, suggests the value of cultural diversity, and the other, from Greek, recognizes a people’s diverse racial origins. Without wanting to revive the old metaphor of a melting-pot, or to talk of assimilation, we might reasonably oppose the use of ‘multicultural’ because that use tends to encourage separatism, which can lead to fragmentation. We all need open-minded exposure to one another’s traditions. Let the warm readiness of people from Pacific societies to talk with one another challenge the cocooned, sometimes cold, behaviour most of us tend to when we travel. To describe our nations as polyethnic recognizes diversity of origin but contains no hint that people should be uncritical of, and remain within, the cultures in which they have been brought up.

The initial and sometimes the major task in an exercise of this kind is to make meaningful sentences, and to recognize which of our initial attempts cannot be right. For example, it makes no overall sense to have as a sentence ‘Challenge the cocooned, sometimes cold behaviour most of us tend to, when we travel, to describe our nations.’ A sentence would not be likely to begin with the words ‘But contains no hint’. ‘From Latin suggests the valuing of cultural diversity’ could not be a sentence. There is likely to be an occasional trap: it is easy to go on, near the beginning, from ‘each’ to ‘one’; but then we have no subject-locution for the verb ‘suggests’. It is helpful, if you have difficulty in delimiting sentences in an unpunctuated passage, to begin from the principle “Every normal sentence has at least one personed and backbone verb” (*MS* 2:4.6), to identify such verbs, and then to identify their subject-locutions, since each of them, unless it is an imperative, must have its matching subject-locution (1:7.14). Look

out, too, for comparisons, contrasts and parallel structures (5:3.5): ‘One, derived from Latin, suggests ..., and the other, from Greek, recognizes ...’.

Four principles are often helpful in this section after the sentences have been decided upon, as well as in one’s general writing. **Often commas are used in pairs, around some inserted phrase or clause.** Here we have the following groups of words that need a comma before and after: ‘derived from Latin’, ‘from Greek’, ‘sometimes cold’ and ‘and remain within’. ‘Or to talk of assimilation’ could have such a pair or just a comma at the end. **Interrupting commas (5:3.10) should be avoided.** Two candidates made the mistake of thinking that the length of the phrase ‘the warm readiness of people from Pacific societies to talk with one another’ justified a comma between it and the verb ‘challenge’, used after an earlier ‘let’. **Commas are needed for clauses or phrases that add additional comments rather than identifying an entity or** (as the ‘that’-clause in this sentence has just done) **a range, but not for those that identify:** so it was a mistake to put a comma between ‘the cultures’ and ‘in which they have been brought up’. In general, **when words are being written about, rather than used,** as ‘multicultural’ is in the middle of the passage, **they should be put in inverted commas, preferably single (1:3.2).** One could perhaps justify omitting those inverted commas for the two opening words, thinking of them as though they were parts of implied sentences such as ‘Are they to be called multicultural? Or polyethnic?’.

Section 3

The marks ranged from B and B- to two CBs and one Just below C.

Passages chosen for this section have come from Britain, the United States and Australia, some recent and some from years long past, and have dealt with a very wide range of subjects. The study of such passages in past papers, in many cases with reference to reports, helps to enlarge one’s horizons and is also good preparation for any exam in this series. As the section-title implies, the candidate is expected both to explain and to comment: to explain some of the writer’s words and/or sets of words, to show a general understanding of what he or she is saying, and to offer some relevant comment in response to one or more questions. That is not without difficulty, and it is a very good test of one’s general education and range of sympathies.

i. When explaining a word used as a particular part of speech in a particular context, one’s explanation should be of adjectival form when the word is an adjective, of verb-form when it is a verb, and so on. Often a group of words is needed to bring out the significance of a single word. The candidate who wrote “Empathetic means to have the understanding of someone’s feeling and to walk in someone’s shoes” certainly gained credit for “having the right idea”, but a grammatical answer would be either “‘Empathetic’ means the same as ‘understanding someone’s feelings’ and its use conveys the idea of what is called walking in another’s shoes” or “To be empathetic is to understand someone’s feelings, to be able, as we say, to walk in his or her shoes.” In the first case we are writing directly about the word, in the second using it, even though in order to explain it (*MS* 1:5.6).

ii. One candidate made the interesting point that a deficiency may be readily rectified whereas a defect is something that cannot be overcome or is hard to overcome. The examples offered in support of that were ignorance of some matter of taxation on the one hand and a damaged tendon on the other. I would draw here on the difference between portions and features. If a portion of X is missing or damaged or is not functioning properly, X has a defect (is defective) in that respect, as a CD may have a scratch. If X has less of a feature than it ought to have, or normally has, then X is deficient, as a book on running is if it does not bring out the joy of the activity itself at its best. Consulting the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993 edition), I find that each noun has the other included in its explanation, but in the more recent of the examples given they could not be interchanged. Burchfield has a good discussion of the two adjectives ‘defective’ and ‘deficient’, though he does not note that, whereas we would say ‘He has insufficient courage’, we would not say ‘He has deficient courage’ but ‘He is deficient in courage’.

iii. Here one is asked to comment on the recent emphasis on self-esteem. Has it become a fetish? Is it responsible for the three consequences the imagined speaker alleges it to have had? One candidate made the very good point that it is not correction but a condemnatory manner in correction that lowers self-esteem; but the question here was whether the kind of emphasis there has been on self-esteem has in fact led to reluctance to correct. One might deny that in respect of sport and the arts, but it has certainly been a factor in the teaching of English to young native speakers. Another candidate misunderstood the question, thinking that it referred to self-esteem in teachers rather than to self-esteem as a quality of students given allegedly excessive importance by teachers. A third gave rather too much attention to an admittedly vivid example from the United States on the promotion of self-esteem in children: a cup the writer had seen had on it several examples of encouraging remarks a parent could make to build up such self-esteem. It is important in an exam to judge what one has time for: in this case the candidate should have limited this answer so as to have time to tackle question iv.

iv. The phrase ‘as a whole’ was important here. The passage as a whole is not about being a sympathetic parent to one’s children, important though that is said to be, but about adapting that attitude to oneself, or rather to “[the] frightened and aspiring aspect of ourselves and others”. (That phrase would enable one to correct the criticism that we are being asked to be “a kind of parent to ourselves”.) Thus here, as in iii, it was very important to understand what one was being asked to do, and to do just that. Notice that there was emphasis on giving “**your own** response to the paragraph as a whole”: this was an opportunity to say what you thought of it, and what “bells”, if any, it rang for you. One candidate wrote well of the need to be “patient to ourselves” (‘with’ is the usual preposition in talking of objects of one’s patience). Another, although making two mistakes in writing “its good to except the failure”, went on to express very well a less favourable view of the passage, ending with a vivid metaphor:

... one also need[s] an urge to analyse and do better next time. That is how you learn from your failures, and improve next time. Acting like a parent may not work[,] because a person can lose his passion to succeed in the forest of “sympathy”.

Section 4

Marks were B+, B- (two candidates), CB and C++. These marks were agreed upon by Dr John Williams and the chief examiner.

i. It was vital in this, the major subsection, to distinguish Frank's **arguments** (a) from his conclusion and (b) from one another, **and comment on them**, rather than to give one's own views (however justifiable), even with some reference to Frank, of matters relevant to the relationship of teachers and parents. There was need and scope for that in ii. In this use of the word 'arguments' (notice the plural) one is referring to more than one attempt to **justify**, or at least **provide some support for**, a proposition that the speaker wants to establish, which is called his or her **conclusion**, whether it comes last, as here, or not. It is common and helpful to distinguish the **premise** or **premises** of an argument from the conclusion drawn therefrom: premises provide **reasons** (not necessarily good ones) for making some claim. Often a set of arguments proceeds cumulatively: one or more conclusions are drawn along the way and then themselves become premises for the major conclusion. It is common to call arguments sound or unsound, or cogent or lacking in cogency. If and only if they are offered as **deductive** arguments (i.e., such that the conclusion is held to be unavoidable given the premise(s), on pain of self-contradiction), they can be called valid or invalid. There are no degrees of validity. **Non-deductive** arguments can be called strong or weak, and those adjectives can have 'very' or 'quite' in front of them. All of Frank's arguments are non-deductive. Often, when non-deductive arguments are weak, as they are in his case, it is because of exaggeration, misrepresentation, and/or neglect of some important factor(s).

Sometimes in Section 4 one may be asked to say what the overall conclusion or main claim is. Here it was stated by the examiner to be in paragraph 5. To distinguish arguments from one another it is useful to employ such words as 'First' and 'Secondly', and, in this case, in order to do so concisely and show that the arguments to be mentioned and discussed are actually Frank's, it would be wise to take the hint about referring to a paragraph by the letter P and a numeral. Here is an answer for this subsection that proceeds in those ways.

Frank has four arguments for his conclusion. First (in P1) he attaches weight to teachers' professional status, but more weight than it ought to be given. Professional people, duly qualified, in many cases registered, and often experienced, do deserve respect as such; but they are not infallible, as is widely realized concerning doctors. No practice is shown to be the best to follow simply because it has been widely adopted by professionals.

The second is similar. In P2 Frank claims that teachers keep up to date and implement the latest ideas. Often they do, but there is no guarantee that latest ideas are wisest. Educational experts have some tendency to go to extremes, as is suggested by the prevalence of the expression 'the swing of the pendulum' in that field.

The third argument relies on unfavourable presentation of the concerned parents (P2 and P4): they are so characterized as to suggest that their “out of date” ideas belong to “teacher-bashing” and do not deserve attention. It is essential in reasoned controversy to find out what the case of one’s opponents is and examine it at its best without bad-mouthing them.

Fourthly, it is implied at P3 that we have little to learn from earlier education, dismissed as often “boring”. The fact that education was sometimes boring in the past does not show that there is nothing to be learnt from earlier methods. In particular, repetition, not necessarily boring, enables learning to be consolidated. Some things have to be done even though some people may find them boring.

Frank, therefore, does not present a sound argument to show that the parents’ complaints should be disregarded, let alone that they should be dismissed as “interfering” and patronized.

None of the five candidates distinguished Frank’s arguments from one another in this way, and only one (who gained the best mark) used the letter P and a numeral to refer to any paragraph other than the last. A good motto in approaching this section (with its title “Factors and Arguments”), and indeed any cumulative case that someone presents, is “Separate out the arguments provided, and comment critically on each, looking out for any factor given too much or too little weight, or wrongly neglected.” The candidate just mentioned drew valuably on his personal acquaintance with the fact that a pharmacist who has known a client well has sometimes had grounds to dissent from a doctor’s handling of the case, and went on to make the excellent related point, also made by another candidate, that “parents do have a very good understanding of their child’s needs and wants and should therefore be listened to”.

ii. This subsection was handled better. Candidates recognized the value of listening to parents and taking their comments seriously. How important it is for teachers, especially when their pupils are not yet twelve, not only to explain to parents what they are doing and why, but also to seek, welcome and learn from parents’ thoughts and value their cooperation in their children’s education. David Ayerst, the British expert on education, wrote in his book *Understanding Schools* (Pelican 1967): “Five-year-olds are still so enormously dependent on adults that it is ridiculous that the two sets of adults most concerned, parents and teachers, should not know each other well” (p.65). The best answer included these words (I have made some amendments: words asterisked should be deleted):

... any feedback from the parents should be treated very seriously as parents know their kids* [children] the best, [and] are [often] able to interpret their thoughts much better [than teachers can]. And* [Moreover,] by simply listening to the parents, you make them feel comfortable, because they are being “listened to”.

(Of ‘kid’ Burchfield says “it is now markedly informal and should be restricted to such contexts”.)

Some errors of grammar, etc.

Here, to give practice in sentence-correction, are some defective groups of words from responses in this section, followed by corrections, explanations, sometimes advice, and often references to *MS* and/or Burchfield. Readers are invited to cover such additional material with a card or an envelope, and seek first to do their own correcting.

There are a lot of education in the past which can bring a lot of value to the students now.

Because 'education' is a singular noun, 'a lot' is not here like 'many', and takes a singular verb. Avoid repetition of 'a lot'. No 'the' before 'students' because we are here thinking of students generally. 'There is a lot of educational method from the past that/which can still be valuable for students now.' On 'that' and 'which' as relative pronouns, see the end of 4:2.5, and Burchfield on 'that' (relative pronoun), 3.

Examination is one of the good practice to assess the progress of students.

'One of the' needs a plural noun to follow. 'Examination', as used in academic contexts, is usually an NC (a noun for something countable: *MS* 1:5.6) rather than an NU (a noun for something uncountable), and so not normally used in the singular without an introductory word such as the article 'an'. 'The practice of holding examinations is a good one for assessing student progress.'

The approach to education has and will change, however the knowledge that is passed on by teachers to their students has changed very little.

In the first clause, 'has changed and will change' (3:7.12). Not 'however' here after a comma, but the proper conjunction 'but' (2:2.6; see Burchfield on 'however', 5.)

He is correct in saying that we would not challenge a doctor, but sometimes, we do that is why we get second and third opinion ...

To avoid inconsistency, say 'It is correct that, in most cases, we would not challenge a doctor.' We cannot go straight to 'that is why' after 'do', and 'why' is not in place here. 'Opinion' is an NC. After 'a doctor', say 'However, sometimes we do, seeking a second or even a third opinion.'

It seems like he is adopting a position in which the outcome of the children education should be relied upon him

'That', not 'like', here. A good rule still is not to use 'like' as a conjunction in formal English (5:3.4, and see Burchfield's long entry for that use of 'like'). 'Children's education': there must be an apostrophe and *s*. See 5:3.12, and remember the general rule for adding the apostrophe and often but not always *s*: think of the form 'the X of the Y', and then, when you put X second, add an apostrophe to Y, and then an *s*, except in the case of a plural noun ending in *s*. 'Rely' is used in the passive with 'on' or 'upon', but of persons, as in 'he can be relied upon'. 'It seems that he is adopting the position that the children's education should be left to him.'

I would recommend the teachers to engage the dissatisfied parents more

Though the *OALD* and Burchfield allow this use of ‘recommend’ with a personal object-locution and an infinitive, it would be more idiomatic to say ‘I would recommend that the teachers engage more with the dissatisfied parents’ or ‘I would advise the teachers to engage’ It would be helpful to study, in a dictionary such as the *OALD*, uses of ‘recommend’, ‘advise’ and ‘suggest’, and also ‘engage’, noting uses of infinitives with ‘to’ and of prepositions.

... what is required to achieve by performing different activities at school.

Say, with two passive verbs, ‘what is intended to be achieved by different activities at school’ or, with one, ‘what different activities at school are intended to achieve’.

This will build the confident in the parents to entrust their children to the school. The teachers should not response to the parents in a negative way

Instead of the adjective ‘confident’, the noun ‘confidence’, and instead of the noun ‘response’, the verb ‘respond’. It is a very good practice to build up sets of notes on word-families, with particular attention to different parts of speech. Learners of any language need to develop their sensitivity to the parts of speech they need at particular points.

Teachers should ensure the parents that they are putting all the effort to teach the children and ensure that the children enjoy learning and making progress in their education.

‘Ensure’ in its first use here has been confused with ‘assure’. ‘Teachers should convince the parents that they are putting all their efforts into teaching the children in such ways as to ensure that they both enjoy learning and are making progress.’

Section 5

The marks agreed upon by Professor Jack Gregory and the chief examiner happened to fall within a small range: B (i.e., right in the middle of the B grade), B?- for two essays, and B- for two. Two of the five candidates chose topic D; B, M and N were the choices of the other three. Comments will be provided here in that order, though first one general point must be made and explained, as it has to be so often concerning essay-writing on set topics: a writer must make sure that the essay “remains entirely relevant to [its] **topic**”.

A topic is much more specific, more limited than the subject to which it belongs, and what makes an essay a good one is often, more than anything else, that it is focused on its topic rather than ranging more widely over the terrain of the subject. If university teachers drew this distinction between subject and topic more sharply, and set specific topics, usually fresh ones, with great care, they would be far less worried than they often are about plagiarism from the Internet or books or previous essays, or

the regurgitation of lecture-notes or prepared essays; and they would be training their students to focus their attention in ways that would assist them in many areas of later life, e.g., in dealing with questions or problems raised by clients – or spouses, partners or children. To be sure, sometimes because they have to be mentioned and sometimes “out of left field”, a good writer will bring in “an appropriate range of factors and considerations”, but they all need to face the test of relevance to the topic. The only exception to this rule is the rare case in which a candidate decides to begin by challenging the wording of the topic and proposing an alternative, a rash move indeed unless he or she puts up a cogent defence for so doing.

The lengthy fifth sections of the reports for March and September 2004 are recommended as guidance in the craft of essay-writing.

Neither writer on D concentrated on the **principles** for determining **which** people should be permitted to immigrate. (It is helpful to highlight or underline the words in a topic that one takes to be crucial.) One did not get to principles until the fourth of eight pages, but wrote rather on problems concerning immigration. Professor Gregory began his comments with “A very fluent essay which indicates that you have a good general command of English”, noted the need for attention to sentence-structure and punctuation (semi-colons were misused), and said that the essay would have been better if there had been “more concentration on the desirable principles”. He mentioned family reunions and protection of refugees.

The other essay on D came much nearer to discussing principles by listing eight “key factors” that the writer thought important. However, principles are not the same as factors. Principles are needed in determining, for good reasons, the proportions of the intake of immigrants on the three very different bases of skills, refugee status and family reunion. The writer dealt well with the first two, and also showed awareness of the difficult question of whether someone was likely to “integrate with the mainstream Australian society” (perhaps we would do better to say “be a law-abiding, tolerant and cooperative citizen”): discretion, it was proposed, should be left to the immigration officer. The essay was weakened by omission of articles (as in ‘there was lot of attention’ and ‘Health check is an important part’) and by errors in spelling and grammar. It is very important in learning any language to look out for “danger ditches” (*MS 5:2.2*) and make notes related to them, so that one frequently looks at lists containing words one might misspell (e.g., ‘there’, ‘their’ and ‘they’re’) or confuse with others of different meaning.

The topic at B required attention to “principles [to] guide political decisions on whether taxes should be raised or lowered”. The writer attended rather to factors to take note of or questions to ask in particular situations. A principle frequently adopted in Australia and elsewhere has been “Reduce taxation whenever you can, especially just before elections.” As a result, it might well be argued, too little attention has been given to infrastructure, research and education. One’s attitude to the principle of progressive taxation, which should be mentioned in dealing with this topic and could be discussed, will influence one’s view of whether tax rates should (in general or on particular occasions) be rather higher or rather lower for particular income groups.

The importance of developing one’s knowledge of grammar is apparent from the following paragraph, which readers may treat as in Section 4:

Thirdly, once the cost of providing the services to the society and the sources of funding for the provision of services is determined. It is time to analyse whether there is room to improve the services or even to introduce new ones (like infrastructure, build new hospitals develop educational programs). Once all these factors are quantified is time to check how the government is going to fund these activities.

‘... the cost ... and the sources ...’, so ‘are determined’. ‘Once’ as used here is a conjunction, introducing a subordinate clause that is adverbial (2:4.3f): an adverbial clause of time (6:2.4). Therefore the full stop after ‘determined’ must be replaced by a comma so that the sentence continues with ‘is’ in ‘it is time’ as its backbone verb (2:4, 3:1.1-3). ‘Once all these factors are quantified’ is also an adverbial clause of time, and should not be regarded as a noun clause suitable as a subject-locution for the verb ‘is’. Probably the writer made not that error here but the common one (for those who are used to the Spanish ‘*es*’) of writing ‘is’ where English requires ‘it is’. The parenthesis requires parallelism (5:3.5) and therefore gerunds (verbal nouns: 3:5.6) to match the noun ‘infrastructure’: say ‘such as infrastructure, building new hospitals and developing educational programs’. ‘Enquire’ would be better than ‘check’. ‘Further’ before ‘activities’ would make clearer the limited reference of ‘these activities’.

The essay on M recognized the need to encourage ambition but also to guard against the attitude that one must win at all costs, and also warned against the danger that parents may impose their own ambitions on their children. It would have been valuable to ask whether it is ambition itself that makes people pressured etc. and narrows their personalities. There was a tendency to repeat nouns such as ‘children’ where pronouns could have been used (1:6.6). Mistakes were made where past participles were needed, used respectively in the active “voice” and in the passive (3:3.5, 7.2f) where the writer had ‘they have try’ and ‘if children are not encourage’. A good exercise would be to go through the third column of a table of irregular verbs and employ each of, say, five or ten words (in any one session) in a short sentence or in two short sentences if the verb is used transitively and can therefore be given first an active form and then a passive one (3:3.1,5).

The English of the essay on N was good. It is important to use and place the word ‘only’ with care (2:2.7), not just for grammatical reasons and to avoid ambiguity, but because one can easily obscure with that word the difference between a necessary and a sufficient condition or set of conditions. The writer had “If we are naturally gifted at something, for example mathematics, we could easily excel at it if we have interest in it, because only interest and desire could foster excellence.” Better to make it clear that no more than a necessary condition is being set out in that ‘because’-clause: say ‘because excellence can be fostered only if there is interest and desire as well as talent’. (A point of grammar in the original sentence: replace the second ‘could’ by ‘can’ and either the first by ‘can’ or ‘have’ by ‘had’.) The essay was weakened by the fact that too much of its unduly short length was taken up with the first sentence of the topic, which is in most (though not all) circumstances platitudinous, and no attention given to excellence-promoting factors other than talent, interest and desire (for example, dedication, perseverance, self-criticism and criticism from others, high standards and a teacher’s encouragement) or to ways in which healthy competition can prove to be another promoter of excellence.

John Howes
Chief examiner