

**FORMAT OF THE QUESTION PAPER**

This paper consisted of two sections - Section A and Section B. Candidates were required to answer questions in both sections.

Candidates are given 1 hour 45 minutes to answer both questions.

**SECTION A (QUESTION 1) : DIRECTED WRITING**

The candidate was required to write a responses to a task in clear and accurate Standard English, using a style and tone appropriate to the task. For SPM 2008, the task required the candidates to write an article about a friend who had been chosen as the best group leader at a leadership camp. Based on the notes in the rubric, candidates were expected to provide details of the friend, reasons why he/she was chosen and also the awards received. Candidates also had to give two other reasons of their own.

**SECTION B (QUESTION 2) – CONTINUOUS WRITING**

This section tested the writing skills. It tested the candidate's ability to produce a piece of continuous prose in accurate Standard English. It also tested the candidate's ability to respond relevantly and creatively to a task chosen from a number of alternatives. The candidate had to choose one of the 5 titles to write a composition of about 350 words in length..

**GENERAL PERFORMANCE**

On the whole, candidates did not fare as well in this paper as in Paper 2. A big proportion scored below the median while not many belonged to the top range. This showed that the majority of the candidates had yet to master the writing skills in English. However, candidates who did not attempt the paper (a sizeable number) left no evidence for the examiner to base their judgment on.

**GENERAL PERFORMANCE OF CANDIDATES ACCORDING TO THEIR GROUPS**

**High performance candidates** displayed very good linguistic ability and were able to address the task accurately and clearly. Few grammatical mistakes were made and a flair for the language was shown. Vocabulary was precise and varied. Varied sentence types and structures were employed to achieve intended effect. The writing was coherent with appropriate use of punctuation and paragraphing. An appropriate tone was also employed.

**Candidates with average performance** understood the task before them but lacked the linguistic ability to write effectively. They were unable to sustain accuracy throughout. Vocabulary was limited and sentence structures repetitive. Answers generally displayed a lack of organization and coherence.

**Low achieves candidates** lacked the language competence and gave Sections A and B the minimal treatment. There was a high density of serious errors which caused blurring in meaning and in some places, meaning was hardly comprehensible. In extreme cases, candidates merely copied the rubric or did not attempt the question. However, Section A did offer some opportunity for the candidates to answer because some guidance/ points/ key words were provided.

## **DETAILED PERFORMANCE**

### **SECTION A : DIRECTED WRITING**

The candidates were required to write a responses to a task in clear and accurate Standard English, using a style and tone appropriate to the task. For SPM 2008, the task required them to write an article about a friend who had been chosen as the best group leader at a leadership camp. Based on the notes in the rubric, candidates were expected to provide details of the friend, reasons why he/she was chosen and also the awards received. They also had to give two other reasons of their own. The candidates were advised to spend 45 minutes on this section. (15 for Content and 20 for Language)

#### **Performance of candidates in Section A and mistakes made**

General performance of candidates was analyzed based on three ability groups: good, average and weak.

#### **Group (a) : Good**

Candidates in this group fulfilled the assessment objectives. The correct format was used. Candidates wrote in clear, accurate standard English with a wide vocabulary. They were competent in paragraphing, spelling, punctuation, and were able to use cohesive and logical devices to link sentences. Ideas were well-developed and the responses had appropriate tone and style.

Below is an excerpt taken from a candidate's article which reflect the above description.

On the 1st and 2nd of October 2008, our school organised its 10th annual Elite Leadership Camp. Held at Kem Pahlawan atop Fraser's Hill, the ~~2-day~~ two-day camp centred on moulding students of the school into responsible young adults before they leave bid farewell to their secondary school life. The camp, which was open to Form Five students, culminated in the presentation of the 'Best Group Leader' title to a deserving student.

### Group (b) : Average

The candidates in this group did comprehend the rubric and showed understanding of the requirements of the task. Responses showed competence in the language. The correct format was used but the writing lacked accuracy. Ideas were adequately developed but were at times disorganized. Sentence structures lacked variety resulting in an uninteresting essay. Most of the errors were single word errors that could easily be corrected without having to restructure the whole sentence.

Below are examples of candidates' responses which fall into this category.

#### Example 1

She was chosen as the best group leader because she is a responsible person. She took care of ~~the~~ her group excellently. She took all the responsible if anything happen to one of her team members.

#### Example 2

Several mistakes in her decisions during camp but she owned up <sup>to them</sup> ~~to~~ courageously. 'Katie made

### Group (c) : Weak

For candidates of this group, format might be completely missing or incorrect. Responses was not organized. There was hardly any accurate sentence. Ideas were less developed or undeveloped or lifted without proper context. Some resorted to stringing or using of words which showed little or no understanding. However, some marks could still be awarded for content. Meaning was often blurred. There were serious and persistent errors in tenses, word choice and sentence structures. In very weak candidates, there was a predominant use of Bahasa Melayu and interference from mother tongue. Some merely copied the questions.

These can be seen in the examples below.

#### Example 1

If want reason he was chosen must be responsible
for any people a following this camp. He also must caring
group and care anybody. must be a for selfish. Best speaker
for camp debate a voice very high and voted the most
co-operative at the camp.

#### Example 2

Write Reasons why a was chosen or bad the Value
of a true friend to add provide given or your is a this story,
who worked <del>so</del> succeed in life one far by school high <del>music</del>
<del>stars</del> when is the club, who i'm gone a <del>years</del> a future or
wife on the was as the best to provide an ending; irresponsible, the
Best speaker for the camp <del>debate</del> article caring to in detail's
certificate of achievement school.

## Weaknesses

Weaknesses in the candidates' responses could be classified under the following headings:

### 1. Inappropriate format

Inability to provide the required ending:

Other reason is the kokurikulum result is very good and very disiplin student.
writer by ( R ) Ramu's Friend

Signing off using a letter-format.eg. Yours sincerely, Yours truly, Yours faithfully etc.

The title is mentioned in the body.

The article is, my friend do have "Best Group Leader". He name is Amirul and he age 22 years old. The Family background Amirul is very nice, rich and very suitable. For leadership camp school attended the best group.
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Written as a dialogue.

I : Hi, I want to interview you, Can?
He : Yes, Can. what you want to asking?
I : What is your name and age and family background?

## 2. Errors of transposition:

Eg: He also can care for others.  
His name father is .....  
He very love his friends. (He loves his friends very much)

## 3. Subject-verb agreement/concord

Eg: He live at Kampung Teloi  
This camp have organized by my teacher.  
She have three sisters.

## 4. Incorrect use of prepositions or omission of prepositions

Eg: I am of charge on our school magazine  
She age twelve since 20 November 1989.  
She was chosen by Best Group Leader.  
She always takes good care to her friends.

## 5. Errors in punctuation

Eg: His fatherss name is Mohd. Hairi.  
he attended the camp with me.  
I also go for the camp with fahmi  
I was with he go into the jungle. then we see a snake.

## 6. Wrong pronoun

Eg: Md. Helmi bin Samad has two brothers, her first brother...  
Kamaruddin has two siblings, him go to school with he brother,  
Sharul.  
Razif is a responsible boy. She was awarded the Best Camp  
Leader.

## 7. Misspelling

Eg: bisnesman, acheivement, sucessful, friends, disappointment, fell  
(feel), feeld(field), principle (principal)

## 8. Colloquialism

Eg: guy, wanna, donno, ain't, gonna

## 9. Verb Forms/Tenses

Eg: Last week, the school had organized a camp.  
He can even walked for ten miles  
My friend was choose as the Best Group Leader.  
After marching, we have to stood under the sun.  
Yesterday, it is rain very heavily. He was borned with five siblings

## 10. Singular - Plural

Eg: He was borned with five sibling.  
He has two brother and two sister  
All the group leader is going to the camp

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANDIDATES**

1. Read the instructions/rubric carefully before answering any question – be sure of the task/format before writing. Read and underline the key words or task words that is required to be performed so that you do not forget to complete the task as you write the essay.
2. Use all the content points given in the rubric.
3. Use appropriate tone; be audience conscious.
4. Tick the content points you have used to ensure that all the content points are in.
5. For good candidates, try to use sophisticated structure and precise vocabulary.
6. For average candidates, do not write long sentences because the tendency to make mistakes is higher.
7. Improve spelling – use a dictionary when necessary.
8. Do not take punctuation lightly. Punctuation errors can be serious errors.
9. Answer all the questions in the examination. Any attempt, however weak, will merit some marks. Not attempting = '0' mark.
10. Read a lot to improve general knowledge and vocabulary

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS**

1. Teach candidates to identify key words or task words.
2. Teach candidates how to read the question and how to identify the main content points.
3. Practise different genres like letter, report so that candidates are able to use the appropriate tone and register in the essay.
4. Teach candidates to construct basic simple sentences.
5. Remind the candidates to allocate the last 3 to 5 minutes for checking.
6. Point out to candidates to use Standard English.
7. Remind the candidates to use all the content points given in the rubric.
8. Devote more time on grammar and sentence construction so that the candidates will be able to write grammatically correct and varied sentences.

9. Train candidates to write a variety of sentence structures. Teach them how to use the different types of structures appropriate to the tone required in the task
10. Introduce 'peer-editing' in the classroom so that the candidates learn to identify and rectify errors, thus improving their own linguistic skills.
11. Encourage reading

## **SECTION B (QUESTION 2) – CONTINUOUS WRITING**

This section tested the candidates' writing skills. Its main objective was to assess the candidates' ability to produce a piece of continuous prose in accurate Standard English. It also tested the candidates' ability to respond relevantly and creatively to a task chosen from a number of alternatives. Five interesting topics were given and each candidate had to write a composition of about 350 words on one of the topics. The candidates were advised to spend one hour on this section.

### **GENERAL PERFORMANCE**

Overall, candidates did not fare well in this section. A big proportion scored below the median while only a handful achieved the top range of marks. This clearly showed that the majority of the candidates were still weak and had yet to master the writing skills in English.

### **GENERAL PERFORMANCE OF CANDIDATES ACCORDING TO THEIR GROUPS**

Basically, the general performance of candidates was analysed based on three ability groups :

#### **Candidates in the high achievement group :**

This group showed a marked linguistic ability and creativity. They were able to produce a relevant and creative piece of continuous prose. They also displayed a good flair of the language. The language used was entirely accurate and very few errors, which were first draft slips or minor errors, were made. Sophistication, maturity of thought, creativity and originality were clearly visible when they put their ideas and thoughts onto paper. Vocabulary and expressions were apt, precise, stimulating and inspiring. Paragraphs were well-planned and the topic was addressed with consistent relevance. Ideas were well-organised, well-

developed and coherent. Hence, the writing was able to arouse the reader's interest and it was sustained throughout.

Below are some examples taken from the candidates' responses :

### Example 1

That is to say, for all seven inches of potential mistakes that I along with the rest of the world could make with this very pencil, there is only half an inch of redemption.

### Example 2

I realize that this is an incredible amount of rhetoric but really, is it not true that many people are apprehensive at what the road to success holds for us?

### Example 3

After all, we are grooming the nation's future leaders who will lead the nation amidst this challenging period of uncertainty.

### Example 4

Whenever the people in our lives continuously encourage us with one-dimensional words of motivation, we ought not to roll our eyes and brush them aside. "Reach for the stars", they say. Well, I say it's about time we go ahead and do just that.

### Example 5

He is just not my perfect husband.  
That was a snobby, upper east side, caviar eating lady who  
was speaking before this.

### Candidates in the average achievement group :

The candidates in this group showed adequate understanding of the requirement of the task. Development of ideas lacked creativity, depth and maturity. Vocabulary lacked precision with a tendency to use repetitive words and structures. This was mainly due to lack of linguistic ability to write effectively. They were not able to sustain accuracy throughout. Linguistic errors were sufficiently frequent and serious. The writing in this category often displayed a lack of organization and coherence, making the composition uninteresting or lacking in liveliness and interest value.

Some of the examples taken from the candidates' responses are as follows :

### Example 1

Friends are very easy to found, but a true  
friend are very difficult to found. We may be can found  
many friends in our life but true friend may be we  
can found one or two.

### Example 2

I gave her words of encouragement  
but she said she don't need anyone symphatise. She said she is  
happy with her life as long as she has her understanding friends.

### Example 3

Although <sup>by</sup> having examinations can prove that I'm a good student, but I hope that everyone can change their thinking that exams doesn't mean everything or about your future. For those students who really can't score well in exams, just try your best in exams and did it with no regrets!

### Example 4

Every man in this world must have their dream wife. Nowadays, many women is more beauty compare to pass time because our science and teknologi is moden.

### Example 5

After two weeks, I was recover from the sick. When I go back to school, I realise that I don't understand what is teacher teach.

### Candidates in the low achievement group :

The candidates' responses showed minimal understanding of the requirement of the task. They displayed poor linguistic ability. Lack of language competency sometimes resulted in giving the topic minimal/partial treatment. Their ideas were hardly developed. The content may be comprehensible but high incidence of serious errors often made the meaning blur. In some cases, the word order and sentence structures reflected mother tongue interference. As a result, the responses were disoriented, disorganized and almost incomprehensible with frequent extended errors which made reading the script difficult. In extreme cases, candidates merely copied all the 5 topics or the rubric from Directed Writing. Some did not even attempt the question at all.

Below are some examples taken from the candidates' responses :

### Example 1

Actually, to be stars is good chosen. Why, <sup>because</sup> stars have a good personality and name of stars always have at newspapers and face of stars always out of television. What ever stars want to go, sure stars get a VIP served.

### Example 2

Examinations is ~~is~~ very bad because I ~~to~~ have to answer well the time ask me question. I hope last me in the school ~~to~~ don't have any examinations because his broke my live to be lawyer. I so sad to look my report card I have nine nine to all my final ~~is~~ pass. I hope after this ~~is~~ no examinations.

### Example 3

I choose the write about a person who has worked hard to succeed in life because my life also has worked hard at place job.

### Example 4

That time on ~~is~~ words, we ~~is~~ chatting, playing together. ~~Friend~~ ~~True friend hard to find.~~ So, Now I feel happy than last time. I learn alot of thing from him.

## Example 5

When I went back school, I felt that I was done wrong from him. I walk in front ~~to~~ to him and said "sorry always refuse to be your friend!".

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CANDIDATES

### STRENGTHS

The strength of the candidates' language can be classified under the following headings:

#### 1. Ability to use good vocabulary

- .... we would realize that success is a miniscule 1% inspiration but a mind-numbing 99% perspiration.
- .... the sweltering heat oppression and the famine of injustice in 1960s America
- Even inanimate object has more optimism.
- She was the quintessence of beauty and charm.
- .... an incredible amount of rhetoric

#### 2. Ability to use idioms / idiomatic expressions

- *raining cats and dogs*
- *all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*
- *every cloud has its silver lining*
- *study at the eleventh hour*
- *burning the midnight oil*

#### 3. Ability to use appropriate linkers.

- *First and foremost, and as Helen Keller said, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement". Yet, many of us hold back because we fear failure.*
- *In conclusion, there is no denying the fact that examinations are of great importance to one's education.*
- *After a few years working and staying there, he had enough money to buy a house.*

4. **Ability to communicate sense clearly even though there are errors.**
  - *If you never have SPM certificate you cannot work at Malaysia.*
  - *This is one of the way the exam good for all student.*
  - *She only call us if we making trouble at school.*
  
5. **Ability to be creative and humorous**
  - *This average pencil is about 7 inches in length. But it has only half an inch of eraser at the end of it.*
  - *A reckless romantic*
  - *A blatant optimist*

## WEAKNESSES

Weak candidates were found to make errors in various aspects namely :

1. **Wrong Subject-Verb Agreement**
  - *When I falls down on floor no body pull me up.*
  - *My eyes is in a lot of pain.*
  - *She have to take care of us by herself.*
  - *I think that examinations is a bad thing.*
  
2. **Inappropriate use of linking words / connectors.**
  - *Although, before my grandfather passed away he managed to find one of his sisters.*
  - *On the other hand, when I have a problem, I will ask her.*
  
3. **Wrong spelling**
  - *We need to change all there is about ourself.*
  - *.... and nothing was going to seperate her from her current state*
  - *.... hair cascading down to waste length.*
  - *.... towards her appartment door*
  
4. **Having problems with articles**
  - *We hitched a ride from friend to Kuala Lumpur.*
  - *However, a incident at my class this afternoon .....*
  - *... I tried to take a plunge by ....*
  
5. **Inappropriate use of words or phrases**
  - *Examinations are part of schooling life and the education system.*
  - *When the sports started, I was the last who took the last metal rod.*
  - *Amir safe my life.*

**6. Wrong use of pronouns**

- One of they is called acting.
- I started selling the biscuits during recess and eventually all my friends liked it.
- Every man in this world must have their dream wife.
- There was once I tried to take a plunge by asking her to send his picture.

**7. Inability to use prepositions accurately**

- This is the last time I'm going to help you on girls.
- ... Farah needs my help about our English homework
- I occupied the vacant seat opposite with Ibu.
- ... furthered his studies to the United States.
- When he was short in money,

**8. Wrong verb forms / tenses**

- They blow each other kisses and he was gone.
- Since that day, Farhan and I always try to get near Farah.
- So, I went to Farah and help her ...
- Even though she does not talked very much, I was able to get to know her.
- I rather reluctantly leave my bed and followed my very-much-excited friend ....

**9. Lexical distortion and blurring in meaning**

- If studying care full and hard work in they studing dificult and not bad the examination.
- If want to be stars, all to you have to join a talent and win and will to be come a stars.
- In this country have many government schools.
- If you study well the loan to study IPTA or IPTS will given.
- For any people a single and not marriage again must care money for good.

## **SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS AND CANDIDATES:**

1. Teach candidates to plan their work. e.g. mind mapping, brainstorming.
2. Incorporate different teaching strategies to teach writing especially for weak candidates e.g. parallel writing, paragraph writing, process writing,
3. Cultivate the reading habit to enrich their vocabulary and improve their command of the language
4. Candidates should be encouraged to write the required number of words, as some wrote far short of the required number of words.
5. Organize the essay in paragraphs.
6. Edit the essay after completing it.
7. More emphasis on grammar and spelling. Have sufficient grammar practice.
8. Journal writing could be a good way for candidates to express their ideas and by having more writing practice, they may not encounter writer's block.
9. Correctional fluid/tape not encouraged as writing can be smudged or words omitted.
10. Remember to indicate the question number of your answer
11. Listen to English songs or news
12. Watch English documentaries
13. Candidates should try to be more ambitious in terms of :
  - use a variety of sentence structures.
  - sophisticated and extended vocabulary
  - interesting expressions