

# FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

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Paper 0500/01  
Reading Passage (Core)

## General comments

Overall candidates responded well to this paper and their answers revealed both interest in and engagement with the reading passage. Most showed a good general understanding of the material and a pleasing number were capable of identifying some of the more subtle points in some of the questions in **Question 1**. The majority of responses to **Question 2** were of at least adequate length and most candidates showed an awareness of the need to refer to the three elements of this task.

As has been mentioned in previous reports, the standard of written expression was mainly satisfactory to good and there were very few scripts indeed in which the candidates' linguistic capacity was so limited that meaning was significantly obscured. Nearly all candidates made a serious attempt to produce the best work of which they were capable on this paper, and only a very small minority failed to complete the paper to an adequate length.

Handwriting and presentation were usually of at least a satisfactory standard although there remain some candidates who seem to take a perverse pride in producing work which is both scruffy and extremely difficult to read; they should be advised that this is not in their interests. Examiners are unable to credit responses that they are unable to read no matter how hard they try. It should also be made clear to candidates that their answers should be written on the answer booklet and not on the question paper itself as some candidates continue to do – if the question paper is submitted along with the answer booklet, then the Examiners will, of course, mark such responses; however, if this procedure is not followed then any answers written on the question paper will be lost.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1**

The reading passage on which this paper was based was an extract from George Orwell's *Homage To Catalonia* in which the author describes an incident that happened to him while fighting as a volunteer soldier (or 'soldier' as many candidates referred to him) in the Spanish Civil War in 1937. Although it was in no way necessary for the candidates to have any knowledge of the historical context other than that contained in the question paper itself, the fact that many candidates automatically assumed that the event took place during totally different conflicts (the First World War was the most popular choice, but the wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan and Iraq also had their champions) suggested that they had not read the introduction to the passage, in which the date was given, with sufficient care and concentration. The point being made here is not to criticise the candidates' limited historical knowledge but to emphasise that one of the reasons that candidates fail to reach the highest grades is due to a failure to read both the passage and the questions in sufficient detail and with the required concentration. Examiners felt that many candidates had the capacity to score higher marks than those they actually achieved and, in nearly all such cases, this resulted from failing to focus sufficiently clearly on the actual requirements of specific questions. This is particularly the case with the apparently more straightforward tasks, in answer to which many candidates tend to ignore the obvious points and lose marks as a consequence.

- (a) A pleasing number of candidates appreciated the understated tone of the writer and were able to make clear that it was unusual to describe being shot as 'very interesting' when words such as 'scary' or 'terrifying' would have been more appropriate. Less successful responses were able to say that the word was not really suited to the event but were unable to go to the next stage and give a specific explanation as to why they thought that it was so.

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