

## Candidates' Performance

### Paper 1

Paper 1 tests candidates' reading skills, and consists of three parts: Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. Candidates have 1.5 hours to complete Part A, which is compulsory, and either Part B1 (consisting of items of a lower level of difficulty than Part A) or Part B2 (consisting of items of a higher level of difficulty than Part A). The weighting for Part A and Part B is 50% per part. The total number of candidates who attempted Paper 1 was 46,647, of whom around 42.9% chose B1 and around 57.1% chose B2.

### Overall Results

A statistical analysis of Paper 1 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Paper 1 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Part A	42	49.8	21.3
Part B1	42	55.6	20.9
Part B2	42	52.5	17.3

### Part A (Compulsory section)

Part A consisted of three texts on the theme of food. The first text was a recommendation of an eatery. The second text was an article about the challenges faced by packaged food companies as a result of people's rising awareness of more healthy, organic food. The third text was a newsletter on a sustainability plan for a resort. While the topics chosen should have been familiar to candidates, the idiomatic language used in Texts 1 and 2 may have posed a challenge for some. A range of items such as multiple choice, short response, cloze passage and table completion was included in this part of the paper.

The items that were most successfully answered by candidates in Part A were: Q.7i-ii & Q.24 (finding items of vocabulary with particular meaning), with at least 75% of candidates answering these correctly; Q.3 (simple analysis of author's meaning), answered correctly by 72%; and Q.4i-iii (True-False-Not Given, testing detailed understanding of the passages), answered correctly by at least 81%. These suggest a great majority of candidates' strong ability in a good range of skills, across different English language reading ability levels.

The multiple-item gap fills Q.11 & Q.26 were mostly answered successfully by between 30-70% of candidates, and proved solid indicators of reading ability. Many markers and examiners felt that these were useful items to help discriminate between candidates across all ability levels. However, markers and examiners noted that candidates at the lower range seemed to struggle with fitting words of an appropriate word form into the gaps, with inappropriate parts of speech in a gap making correct answers very unlikely, e.g. entering 'local' instead of 'locally' in Q.11.ii ('*ingredients that are sourced locally*'), or 'health' instead of 'healthy' in Q.11.iii ('*we have found creative ways to create healthy dishes*').

However, gap fill items Q.11ii-iii, Q.26i & iv and Q.27.iv proved difficult, being answered correctly by at most 40% of candidates. Examiners and markers highlighted that they saw a lot of answers this year that displayed mistakes by apparently not following the items' instructions, or not copying words carefully into their question-answer book. For example, Q.26 allowed a *maximum* of 2 words per gap, which meant that answers of only one word were to be expected too. Nevertheless, markers reported seeing a number of candidates seemingly trying to come up with two-word answers into each gap. Q.27 asked for *one* word only per gap. However, a number of candidates wrote more than one word in these

gaps. All three sets of these gap-fill items required words/phrases taken directly from the text, which typically means they need to fit the gap grammatically, and be spelt perfectly, to ensure the mark can be safely gained.

Candidates also had difficulty with a range of questions requiring inference in this section: Q.2 (answered successfully by 43% of candidates); Q.6 (18%); Q.8 (33%); Q.9 (3%); Q.13 (20%); Q.14 (37%); Q.18 (4%); and Q.19 (8%), though examiners felt that these items were very useful in identifying candidates at the highest levels. The most common mistakes made with these items tended to be over-copying from the texts, thus indicating that the candidates did not fully understand the answers they had written. In Q.9, for example, (i.e. The *Food Garage* is a perfect 'antidote' or 'cure for ...') the entirety of lines 18-19 was sometimes copied. This hid the simpler correct answer from view (i.e. 'serious dining'). By their nature, these items generally required reading deeper into the meaning of the text rather than finding the answer written word for word. Similarly, Q.18 caught out many candidates as they failed to specify that the issue affecting the 'food and beverage industry' was not affecting the whole industry, but rather only a certain part of it (namely 'Big Food companies').

#### Part B1 (Easier section)

Part B1 comprised two parts linked by the theme of plants. The first text was an extract from an online forum where several residents discussed how to decorate the entrance of their housing estate. The second text was a flyer with information on different types of plants. The texts were felt to have been accessible to most candidates because of the theme, the text type chosen and the language used in the texts. Candidates were required to identify factual information in a range of item types such as matching, gap-fills, True / False / Not given, multiple choice and short responses.

Items answered well by candidates were Q.28-30 (concerning simple factual details about the text & its genre, each answered correctly by at least 78% of candidates), Q.35, 39, 40 & 42i-iii (MCQs asking about important ideas in the text, with over three quarters of candidates getting these correct) and Q.36 (a vocabulary-search item, answered correctly by 72% of candidates).

Candidates had the greatest difficulty with Q.44.i-vi, which were answered correctly on average by only the top fifth of test-takers choosing this part. These items allowed any words to be used to complete the summary, i.e. not only those taken directly from the text, in contrast to the gap-fill questions mentioned in the Part A analysis above. This instruction should be noted by candidates, as it will likely require a more holistic understanding of the messages in this part of the text to ensure that appropriate words can be selected. Some candidates' answers also included more than one word per gap, which immediately meant they were marked as incorrect.

Q.37 asked candidates to identify a word which has a similar meaning to 'too much'. A large number of candidates provided the incorrect answer of '*many*'. Unfortunately, the meaning is fundamentally different to the key 'excessive', which around 41% of candidates identified as the answer. Q.31 was similarly difficult for candidates. It asked candidates to identify what 'them' (line 2) is referring to. The answer needed to be a plural noun ('concrete plant holders'), but many candidates seemed to miss this and wrote singular or uncountable nouns instead (e.g. 'the entrance area of the housing estate'). Grammatically, this cannot have been the correct answer. Such grammatical cues should be noted carefully by candidates when completing such questions.

#### Part B2 (More difficult section)

Part B2 comprised three texts on the theme of space exploration. The first part was a short text about the journey to the Moon in the last century. The second text was about terraforming Mars. The third text was a transcript of a debate on space exploration. Challenges in this part included understanding a theme which was less familiar, and the metaphorical language used in the texts. Candidates were required to work out the metaphors used by the writers and respond to a range of items including identifying the implied meaning of phrases, identifying the tone of speaker and completing a flow chart and summary using their own words.

In this part of the paper, candidates were very successful in answering items asking important and inferred information about the text (Q.53, Q.56, Q.63iv & vi, Q.64 were all answered correctly by over three quarters of candidates), and items asking about the tone and intention of the writer(s) (Q.47, Q.51, Q.58, Q.59, answered correctly by at least two thirds of candidates). These are questions testing some of the higher-order skills and abilities that we would expect to see in the stronger readers choosing to take this part.

In contrast, Q.65i-viii proved to be difficult for candidates. These items required candidates to illustrate deep understanding of the main arguments and support provided by two debaters. Many examiners thought that these items identified the very strongest candidates; each item was answered correctly by only 11.5% of candidates on average. Correct answers typically could not be copied from the text (which many candidates tried to do), needing at least some grammatical manipulation to arrive at the correct answer. This required a complex set of skills that the strongest candidates were able to employ.

Certain items exploring abstract concepts across the texts of this paper (Q.50ii, Q.55 and Q.60) also proved difficult with over two thirds of candidates not being awarded a point. These items asked candidates to explain or identify complex concepts in the texts. For example, Q.55 asked candidates to identify the phrase that indicated the writer's opinion on the relative length of time needed to terraform Mars (i.e. 'a brief interval'). Many candidates interpreted this timespan very literally though, and incorrectly provided one of the more concrete time phrases in the paragraph (e.g. 'several millennia'). This helped to identify candidates who understood the writer's underlying messages as opposed to surface-level details. Q.54, an MCQ which asked candidates to identify the concrete timeframe needed for terraforming Mars, proved even trickier, with only 20% of candidates answering it correctly. Candidates seemed to confuse the descriptions of Mars and Earth here, indicating that a more holistic approach to understanding that section of the text would have been of value.

### Recommendations

As indicated above, there were a number of items for which candidates did not seem to be following instructions carefully. This included word limits not being followed (e.g. one word only, in Q.27), how many times particular options can be used in an answer (e.g. use each letter once only, in Q.43), and other more specific instructions. For example, in some items where candidates were asked to provide words found in the text, they seemed to be providing answers not taken from the relevant parts of the text. In Q.11iv, for instance, the correct answer was 'teenagers', but a number of candidates wrote 'teens', 'children' or 'kids', none of which were in the text.

As also suggested above, markers reported that candidates seemed to have copied an excessive amount directly from the texts this year. In some items this will likely result in no mark being awarded, as copying will be highly unlikely to provide a correct answer (e.g. in Q.65). In others, some copying can be acceptable. However, if too much information is provided, answers can be smothered in irrelevant or incorrect detail, and/or the grammar of the answer becomes difficult to keep under control, making them incorrect. Q.29 in section B1 ('How many people posted in the forum?') was an example of this: only a single number was required ('5') as the rest of the necessary information was provided in the question stem. Nevertheless, some candidates wrote extra words which led to their answers becoming incorrect (e.g. '5 posts'). Candidates are advised to provide sufficient but only the necessary information in their answers.

Candidates should be aware of the grammatical cues provided in the questions themselves to help them in their answers. For example, the answers to sentence completion questions (e.g. Q.9) and gap fills (e.g. Q.27) can usually be identified as particular parts of speech, and reference questions often indicate plurality needed in the answer (e.g. 'them' and 'they' in Q.31 & Q.33 respectively).

### Paper 2

Paper 2 tests candidates' writing skills and consists of two parts: Part A and Part B. Candidates have 2 hours to complete both parts of the paper. The total number of candidates who attempted Paper 2 was 46,522.

## Overall Results

Part A and B were assessed in three domains: content, language and organisation on a scale between 0 to 7 for each domain. A statistical analysis of Paper 2 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Paper 2 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Part A	42	54.0	18.0
Part B	42	53.0	20.0

### Part A

Part A is a short writing task. This year, candidates assumed the role of students, helping their school to organise the annual school fair. Candidates had to make an announcement about the event during the morning assembly and so were given the task of writing their announcement. A poster displaying the date, time, entrance fee and some suggested activities was given as a prompt. The purpose of writing was to inform and persuade the audience to join the event and to solicit the help of schoolmates to organise the activities. The target audience was schoolmates and teachers.

### General Comments

In general, most candidates were able to make use of the prompt to develop their ideas. High-end scripts provided a purpose and the background of the School Fair and the descriptions were developed around a theme. Sufficient details were also included to appeal to the target audience. Some candidates could have shown more awareness of the audience by demonstrating that they were making an announcement in their writing, which is usually concise, direct and to-the-point.

### Content

Most candidates included key information about the event based on the content from the poster. Some candidates elaborated on some of the activities on the poster and gave additional details. Stronger scripts also described how students or fellow schoolmates can help during the event such as designing promotional materials and being school ambassadors. If candidates added some other programmes that were not shown on the poster, those programmes were best linked to the activities given.

### Language

Some candidates were able to make use of more emotive and invitational language to appeal for the support of the target audience. If addressing teachers and the principal, a more formal tone was required whereas an informal tone for addressing peers was appropriate. Higher performing candidates were able to manage this balance well. High-end scripts made use of a range of adjectives and adverbs to describe activities to be held. The future tense was mainly used to describe upcoming activities.

### Organisation

Most candidates were able to develop ideas and organise them into separate paragraphs. Some of them used discourse markers within and across paragraphs to effectively link ideas. Very formal connectives were acceptable if the announcement was written as a script to be read aloud. Some candidates did not develop ideas in a balanced way and left out the last part concerning how schoolmates could help organise the event.

## Part B

Part B comprises eight questions (Q.2-Q.9) based on the elective modules in the senior secondary English Language curriculum (S.4-6). In this part of the examination, candidates were required to choose one question and write about 400 words.

The mean score for each question is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Paper 2 Part B results

Question	Elective	Mean Score (out of 42)	Mean (%)	Popularity (%)
2	Social Issues	24.0	57.0	44
3	Workplace Communication	21.7	51.7	10
4	Sports Communication	19.4	46.1	8
5	Debating	23.3	55.4	12
6	Popular Culture	24.6	58.4	11
7	Short Stories	19.0	45.1	9
8	Poems and Songs	17.3	41.2	4.5
9	Drama	16.9	40.3	1.5

Question 2 (Social Issues) was the most popular question, with almost half of the candidature choosing to attempt it. The popularity of the remaining questions ranged between 1.5% and 12% of the candidature.

The following is a summary of candidates' general performance in each question.

### *Question 2: Learning English through Social Issues*

This question proved to be by far the most popular of the optional questions in Part B of the paper and was attempted by 44% of candidates. This could have been because it was the first option and also because it dealt with a popular topic - electric cars. Candidates were required to write a letter to the editor to discuss why they thought the sales of electric vehicles were so low and make suggestions as to what could be done to attract more people to drive these vehicles.

Most candidates wrote quite long answers and were able to describe in detail the nature and the benefits of electric cars and provide reasons for why their sales were relatively low. The reasons given were related to cost, availability of charging stations and the fact that electric cars are still relatively new and that it would take time before new models of electric cars would come to dominate the market. Candidates were also able to provide relevant suggestions as to how electric cars could become more popular, such as by increasing the accessibility to charging stations and increasing government subsidies to make them cheaper for the consumer. Most candidates were able to provide a balance between reasons for low sales and suggestions for increasing them, with some integrating the two rather than addressing them in separate sections.

Candidates showed an ability to use a range of linguistic forms to discuss the issue, including different tenses and aspects, the passive and active forms, and the use of appropriate adjectives to describe the benefits of electric cars and how drivers might feel about them. Stronger essays were marked by greater grammatical accuracy, more varied vocabulary and more complex sentence structures. Candidates were

able to adapt their writing to suit the genre of a letter to the editor, making it accessible to a general audience and less like a discursive essay.

### *Question 3: Learning English through Workplace Communication*

This question required candidates to assume that they worked in the sales department of a company that sells clothes. Their task was to write an email to their sales manager to suggest changes to the company's no-exchange/no-refund policy. They were required to explain why they thought the policy should be changed, suggest what changes might be made and discuss ways to prevent customers from taking advantage of the new policy.

Candidates had few problems understanding the requirements of the task. Many combined the suggestions for changes and the ways to prevent customers from taking advantage of them, which was an acceptable way to address the task. It was also possible for candidates to suggest possible changes to the existing policy or other changes to the company's operations that might result in there being less need for customers to return purchases, so long as the suggestions were supported with logical reasoning.

Weaker candidates tended to state that the policy should be changed without giving much elaboration or reasons to support or they may have suggested changes that were not related to the no-exchange/no-refund policy.

Candidates tended to use a formal tone in the email as if they were writing to their superior, while some used a less formal tone, referring to the sales manager on first-name terms. As persuasion would also be one of the email's intended purposes, candidates who were able to propose change in a way that is both compelling and thoughtful would score higher marks.

### *Question 4: Learning English through Sports Communication*

The question required candidates to write a job application letter to the Human Resources Manager of Hong Kong Sports Foundation, which was recruiting Assistant Coaches. Candidates were expected to introduce themselves and their athletic history and explain their interest in and suitability for the job. The main duties of the job included designing training programmes for elite athletes, organising international sporting competitions and identifying and supporting local talent.

Stronger candidates made use of sports-related vocabulary and expressions when describing past achievements as athletes in a particular field. They also highlighted specific accomplishments to establish their credentials instead of simply making vain claims. Key concepts such as 'elite athletes' and 'international competitions' were also addressed in some of the letters. However, some candidates gave long narratives of their athletic history without relating them to the job duties. This could not fulfil the requirements of the question. Awareness of the audience was not shown if some irrelevant details were included when recounting past achievements.

Very persuasive letters usually included a wide range of vocabulary and varied sentence structures when describing past achievements and explaining their suitability for the job. The tone usually exuded confidence and positivity. Some candidates emphasised themselves as doers by making good use of the active voice. Appropriate tenses were used to link past achievements to present job requirements.

Some candidates had a good grasp of the organisation of formal letters. An appropriate opening, body paragraphs that addressed the three main duties of the job and a closing that solicited responses from the potential employer were found in stronger pieces. Candidates are reminded not to confuse different conjunctions and adverbials when connecting phrases and clauses, e.g. 'so' versus 'so that', as cohesion might be weakened.

### *Question 5: Learning English through Debating*

This question required candidates to write an essay discussing whether social media influencers are more trustworthy than traditional media advertisements. The question was a relatively popular choice among

candidates, most probably because of the nature of the topic (social media) and candidates in general performed quite well.

On the whole, candidates had a reasonably good grasp of the language of argumentation with stronger candidates using more varied and also more complex forms for presenting, developing and structuring their arguments. Reasons given were related to independence, relatability to the audience and why influencers might be considered more trustworthy than traditional advertisers. Most candidates showed that they were familiar with the structure and organisation of a discursive essay.

Candidates who did not do so well on this question misunderstood the topic as being about influencers and instead discussed the differences between social media and traditional media. Other candidates wrote about the popularity of influencers rather than their perceived trustworthiness, perhaps misunderstanding what trustworthy means in the given context. Whilst poor organisation and irrelevant content characterised weaker essays, stronger candidates wrote convincing arguments with valid and salient examples. They also used words related to social media and the internet, e.g. *Snapchat*, *hashtag*, *viral* etc., which made their essays not only lexically richer but also more diverse in terms of ideas.

#### *Question 6: Learning English through Popular Culture*

This question provided a scenario in which candidates had taken part in a social media challenge called 'The 21-day Gratitude Challenge'. They had to keep a journal about the things they were thankful for. To answer the question, they were required to write a blog post about why they took up the challenge and whether it had changed them in any way. The question proved to be reasonably popular and had the highest mean score in Part B.

Most candidates understood the demands of the question and the register to use in a blog post, making it less formal than for an essay or letter. Most described their desire to take a step back and to reflect on the things that they should be grateful for, particularly in the current times. They wrote mostly about their families and friends and the things close to them that they should be grateful for. Some even described going on 21-day trips or journeys of discovery to try to find themselves and then reflect on what they should be more grateful for.

Weaker candidates misunderstood the task or even the meaning of gratitude and wrote more of an essay on the things that people in general should try to do to improve society and the world in general. Such approaches were relatively rare though. In general, candidates understood the nature of the genre and were able to write a coherent and well-structured piece.

#### *Question 7: Learning English through Short Stories*

In this question candidates were required to write a short story. They were given the scenario of there being a security guard on duty one night and a set of four pictures to guide them to write the story. They were told that the story should be 'scary'.

Candidates showed a lot of creativity and imagination in their stories. Most followed the sequence of the pictures and told of a security guard going to investigate an alarm going off and having some kind of encounter with something scary.

Stronger candidates wrote more accurately in terms of grammar, vocabulary and spelling, and made use of a range of complex and compound sentence patterns. They were able to use the language creatively in building up the kind of tension expected in a scary story, while also retaining coherence so that the reader was able to follow the narrative.

Weaker candidates might have attempted to include elements that create a scary atmosphere in the story but were unable to retain coherence because of either inaccurate grammar or lack of effective use of cohesive devices, making the story difficult to understand. In rare cases, candidates wrote a story about something quite unrelated to the context provided and so were marked down in terms of content.

### *Question 8: Learning English through Poems and Songs*

Candidates were asked to write an essay for their English teacher on the theme of friendship. A poem by Joseph Parry was given to stimulate thoughts on the difference between old and new friendships and whether older ones are better than newer ones.

Most candidates had original comments on different kinds of friendship and showed their creativity by relating friendship with different stages of people's lives and personality differences and supported their arguments with personal experiences and anecdotes. Stronger pieces made use of figurative language such as metaphors to compare and contrast new and older friendships. They also reached sensible conclusions through logical deduction and were balanced in terms of development of the two aspects of the question. Arguments were more persuasive if candidates defined what 'better' meant to them.

Candidates were not expected to write a critique of the poem. A comment on the poem might help address the question but if the focus was solely on the poetic features or aspects not related to old and new friendship, it would be regarded as off-topic. Some candidates struggled with the task requirements as they used a question-and-answer format rather than the essay form to complete the task.

In terms of the use of language, stronger pieces used vivid imagery and examples to engage the reader and provided background information to the ideas being discussed. Rhetorical questions and varied sentence patterns were also found in writing with higher quality. Some candidates also used a more exploratory tone by raising questions and balancing different points of view.

Effective organisation was seen in some scripts through the use of discourse markers, adverbs, and other linking words and phrases to direct arguments logically. Topic sentences were also used in some pieces to explain main ideas in distinctive paragraphs. It is recommended that suitable conjunctions and adverbials be used to show concession, cause and result and to make comparisons and contrast.

### *Question 9: Learning English through Drama*

In this question, candidates were required to write a letter to the production manager at a TV station to outline their ideas for a TV drama series about three generations of a family. This question was the least popular question in Part B, attempted by only a small number of candidates.

Candidates had to briefly introduce the characters, plot and setting of their TV drama and why it would be popular with viewers. There were some imaginative answers to this question, typically recounting the differences between millennials and their parents and grandparents.

Candidates who scored lower on this question may have focused too much on the characters or plot rather than an overall concept of a series and how it can stand out amongst other similar drama stories.

### **Recommendations**

Candidates need to demonstrate their writing ability by making their writing appropriate to the particular text type they are asked to write. Writing simple sentences accurately might be enough in some tasks but might be too limited for others requiring more linguistic variety and flexibility. It is a good idea for candidates to read different text types and to become familiar with what is appropriate for particular purposes and audiences.

As with language choice, coherence can be achieved in different ways depending on the text type. Candidates are usually quite good at connecting ideas explicitly in persuasive or argumentative essays. In some text types (e.g. blog, letter) too much logical development might actually detract from effective organisation, however. Again, familiarity with different text types is key to raising awareness of how these texts are organised effectively.



Part B tasks can be completed in around 400 words. Longer responses will not necessarily gain higher marks simply by virtue of length. If writing beyond the word guide, the length should not impede the communicative effectiveness.

### Paper 3

Paper 3 consists of three parts; Part A, Part B1 and Part B2. All candidates were required to complete Part A and then choose either Part B1 or Part B2. Part B1 is designed to be the easier section, while Part B2 is designed to be the more difficult section. The total number of candidates who attempted Paper 3 was 46,275, of whom around 28.3% chose B1 and around 71.7% chose B2.

### Overall results

A statistical analysis of Paper 3 was carried out. The overall results are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Paper 3 overall results

	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
Part A	56	44.8	25.3
Part B1	53	36.6	25.9
Part B2	53	46.9	17.9

### Part A (Compulsory section)

In Part A, candidates had to listen to four recordings related to the theme of World Expos. As in previous years' papers, the four tasks were designed to be progressively more difficult.

### Task 1 (Mean = 57.2%)

Candidates were required to complete a work schedule to carry out the research on World Expos while listening to the discussion of three student interns (Bonnie, Cherie and Julian) who work for a company called Events Horizon.

Items 1-5 required candidates to fill in some background information about the World Expos presentation. While the first two items about the date (63% correct) and time (80% correct) of the presentation proved to be straightforward for the majority of candidates, the other three items appear to have been more challenging. For item 3 (40% correct), many candidates wrote 'department head' rather than 'department heads', the omission of the plural here being a substantive inaccuracy. For item 4 (56% correct), some candidates wrote 'broad room' rather than 'board room'. For item 5 (48% correct), a number of candidates had trouble with the total number of PowerPoint slides for the presentation.

The next three items required candidates to complete the areas to be covered in the research. Items 6 (74% correct) and item 8 (66% correct) proved to be relatively straightforward as a single word answer ('history' and 'future' respectively) was required. However, item 7 (42% correct) caused difficulty for many candidates as they were required to write a phrase ('good and bad things').

For the remaining items in Task 1, candidates had to complete a table on the work schedule for the research, writing down the dates, person(s) responsible and what to do. The means of items 9, 12, 13 and 15 were high (ranging from 66% to 83% correct), indicating that these were found to be easy by the majority of candidates. For item 10 (51% correct), some candidates wrote 'interview Roy' rather than 'interview Mr. Roy'. Item 11 (10% correct) was found to be one of the most difficult items in the paper. Many candidates simply wrote 'talk'. This was insufficient as the action of going to a talk was not clearly expressed. Rather, such an answer implied that the student interns themselves were to deliver the talk

rather than the reality that they were to attend another person's talk. For item 14 (58% correct), some candidates seemed unfamiliar with the word 'draft'. Item 16 (25% correct) was quite challenging. Many candidates gave incomplete answers such as 'practise' without mentioning 'presentation'.

#### Task 2 (Mean = 47.3%)

Candidates were required to listen to Professor Leung talk about the history of World Expos. This monologue first started with what World Expos are and then went on to describe how they developed in three main stages. For most of the items in the task, candidates were required to complete the answers using short phrases.

Candidates had to first listen to Professor Leung talk about the topic of his presentation and the roles of host countries. Item 17, being the easiest item in the task (81% correct), required candidates to complete the topic of the talk using a short phrase 'bringing people together'. For item 18 (43% correct), many candidates incorrectly wrote 'design' rather than 'decide'.

Professor Leung then talked about how the Expos developed in the first stage. Most candidates were awarded a point for item 20 (60% correct), although some wrote the wrong number. Items 21 (26% correct) and 22 (23% correct) were the most challenging items in the task as candidates were required to write the major achievements of the London Expo using longer phrases 'grew the biggest flower in the world' and 'raised awareness of farming techniques' respectively. Many candidates failed to give complete answers to these items.

Items 23 to 28 concerned the details of the second stage. Candidates needed to answer using a short phrase for item 23 (61% correct). Item 24 (29% correct) proved quite challenging as many candidates were only able to write down the year this stage started (1939) but not when it ended (1987). Items 25 and 26 were relatively straightforward, with 53% and 69% of candidates respectively giving the correct answers. For item 27 (40% correct), many candidates incorrectly wrote 'arts' (the plural form) rather than 'art' (the singular form), which altered the original meaning in the listening input.

Items 29 to 31 focused on what happened in stage 3. Item 29 (53% correct) concerned the period of the stage and proved to be the easiest of the three. For item 31 (35% correct), many candidates wrote 'lower visitors' rather than 'lower number of visitors', which was deemed to be too unclear to be awarded a point.

As in Task 1, candidates tended to perform significantly better in items which required them to give a single word answer.

#### Task 3 (Mean = 41.2%)

Candidates were required to listen to a conversation in which Cherie, Bonnie and Julian discussed how the draft of Cherie's PowerPoint slides could be improved. For all the items in this task, candidates were required to answer using short phrases.

This task was divided into two sections. In the first section (items 32 to 36), Cherie suggested adding two PowerPoint slides to the presentation and candidates were required to write down the details.

Items 32 to 34 related to the downsides of having an Expo and proved to be very challenging for many candidates. For item 32 (20% correct), candidates needed to grasp the concept of millions of dollars being wasted. The word 'disruption' in the answer to item 33 (12% correct) posed a major challenge to most candidates with some writing 'destruction' instead. For item 34 (19% correct), some candidates wrote 'expo buildings are not used' but omitted 'again' or 'after the expo', hence providing an insufficient answer.

For items 35 and 36, candidates had to write a short phrase to complete the reasons why countries would want to hold an Expo. Item 35 (58% correct) proved to be one of the easiest items in this task with most candidates giving the correct answer 'friendship among countries' or an approximate.

For items 37 to 43, candidates were required to use point form/short phrases to write down the suggestions for the layout of the presentation slides. Item 42 (24% correct) was found to be the most challenging in this set of items as a large number of candidates were unable to provide the word 'font'. Many, instead, wrote the word 'form'. Similarly, only 29% of the candidates were awarded a point for item 43 since many failed to put 'bullet points' in its plural form.

#### Task 4 (Mean=30.4%)

In task 4, candidates were to listen to a conversation in which the three student interns talked about the dark side of the history of world expos and whether the story of Ota Benga, a pygmy from Africa, should be included in their presentation. This task mainly required candidates to produce answers in phrases or short sentences and required a greater understanding and interpretation of the whole story concerned.

Items 44 to 47 were more general questions on World Expos. Only 5% of the candidates got item 44 correct. Many wrote 'see things around world', thus missing the word 'from'. The correct answer was 'the only way people could see things from around the world'. Without the word 'from', the meaning is quite different and so a point could not be given.

Items 48 to 53 were about Ota Benga and what happened to him in America. Many candidates got item 48 wrong (23% correct) because they failed to make clear who the subject of their answer was. The question was 'why was Ota Benga and his tribespeople chosen by WJ McGee for the St. Louis Expo of 1904?' A large number of candidates gave the answer 'because he's a pygmy'. The subject in such an answer was unclear and would seem to be WJ McGee rather than Ota Benga and his tribespeople. Candidates are advised to check that their answer is clear in the context of the question and answer in such items.

For item 53, candidates were required to answer a two-part question related to whether candidates thought that Ota Benga's story had a happy ending and then why the candidates thought that. In order to be awarded a point in this item, candidates needed to interpret the information from the listening input and then produce a coherent answer, i.e. expressing that the story did not have a happy ending and supporting this stance with the evidence from the listening input that Ota Benga never returned home to Africa. This item proved to be one of the better answered items in this task with over 56.2% of candidates awarded a point.

In the final part of task 4 (items 54-56), candidates were to complete a table about whether each of the student interns thought the story of Ota Benga should be included in the presentation and why. These three items, especially items 55 and 56, were challenging for the candidates because they needed to understand the whole idea as regards the reason why the story should be included or how it should be included. In item 55 (14% correct) candidates were required to express each of the elements of the answer 'it might offend the Americans in the audience'. Item 56 (6% correct) required them to convey a condition ('yes, but only first half/part is relevant'). The condition of 'but only' proved to be quite tricky as most of the candidates failed to deliver this essence in their answers.

#### Recommendations for Part A

Candidates should familiarise themselves with the tasks in the preparation time. With the help of the instructions, headings and choices given. Candidates should envisage what would be the likely development of the recording content-wise. They are advised to glance through what is expected of them from a more panoramic view by checking out the different item types; if there are charts, multiple choice questions, tables and so on. Subsequently, from the prompts and stems, candidates should predict the required form of answer; whether it should be a number, a person, an action or a phrase with a more complete meaning. For some questions which require a more complete understanding and reasoning, candidates may want to jot down notes, especially all the key words, while they listen and complete their answers afterwards during the pauses. Candidates should also make sure the sentences they write make sense when they review their answers. In a question and answer type item, candidates should make sure that the elements of their answer clearly refer to the elements in the question. For instance, the subject of the candidate's answer should clearly refer to the correct person and correct conjunctions should be used to express the inter-clausal relations clearly.

## Part B

In both Parts B1 and B2, candidates took the role of Nico Lin, a member of the committee assigned to organise the Victoria Cup, a professional women's tennis tournament. Nico works at a company called 'Events Horizon', an organiser of large public events. In both parts, Nico is assigned to write texts related to the tournament. In Part B1, candidates were asked to complete a summary form of special arrangements for the tournament, write a website announcement for the Tennis Activity Day – an associated event which precedes the tournament – and a letter to the editor in response to criticisms and concerns about the tournament. In Part B2, candidates needed to write an email reply to the charity 'Refugee Sanctuary', a letter to the editor in response to complaints about the tournament from a private citizen, and an internal email regarding changes needed to be made to a promotional poster.

The recording provided content points for both Parts. It took the form of a Zoom meeting between a star tennis player, her agent and another member of the tournament's organising committee. Candidates were provided a note sheet with subheadings on which to record the salient points of the discussion for use in the written tasks. Candidates for both Parts were also provided with a Data File: a collection of written texts (plus the note sheet) containing all of the information needed to complete the tasks. A vital skill is required: candidates should be able to identify pieces of information from the recording and Data File and to which task they are relevant. In addition to this, their use of a range of accurate sentence structures, organisation of the information and the appropriacy of the overall text would be graded.

The performance of the candidates in each Part and Task will be discussed below.

### Part B1

In part B1, candidates adopted the role of Nico Lin and were asked to write three documents in preparation for the staging of the Victoria Cup, a professional women's tennis tournament, organised by Nico's employer Events Horizon. Firstly, they had to complete a form summarising the special arrangements at the tournament, then a short website announcement for the Tennis Activity Day held just before the tournament. Finally, they were tasked with writing a letter to the editor in reply to an article - *Victoria Cup rubbish* - containing criticisms about the tournament. For each task, candidates needed to identify the relevant information from the sources provided. Candidates listened to a recording of a Zoom meeting between the tennis player Lara Taranova, her agent Victor Laurent and the head of the Victoria Cup project team Anthony Au and could make notes on this using suggested headings on page 3 of the Data File. The written texts in the Data File included emails, minutes of a meeting, a transcript from a feedback interview, an article from the *Hong Kong Press & Journal*, a WhatsApp message, a blog webpage and a job advertisement. Candidates needed to organise relevant information from these texts and present it as required in the instructions for each task.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 5:

Table 5: Paper 3 Part B1 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
5	17	40.8	33.0
6	18	39.7	27.4
7	18	29.5	25.3

From Table 5, it can be seen that Task 7 proved to be the most challenging for this year's B1 candidates. The overall mean was 36.6% for all of Part B1. It proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

### Task 5

In Task 5, candidates were required to complete the Special Arrangements Form for the Victoria Cup. The information provided in the form is for updating the tennis players and their agents about the tournament. Candidates could use the email exchange, the WhatsApp message, the minutes of the Victoria Cup Committee meeting and the notes from the Zoom meeting to complete the form. This was the best-performed task in 3B1, with a mean of 40.8%.

Many candidates seemed to be unaware that they were preparing the form for the tennis players and agents. Their job was to notify the intended audience about the special arrangements, which were all related to the needs of the tennis players. Candidates had to think from the players' perspective about their concerns with playing tennis matches in a foreign city. Candidates who were able to consider the needs of the players were more likely to be able to identify the useful information to extract from the Data File and the recording. The form itself is also arranged into sections corresponding to players' concerns, for ease of reference. A key skill in this task was identifying which section each piece of information best fitted under. This also appeared to be challenging for some candidates to master.

Task 5 seemed to be quite demanding on most candidates as almost half of the task completion items were from the recording. Candidates performed better on factual items found in the Data File and on items which were numbers spoken in the recording (item 5.4a – '200' and item 5.8 – a phone number). Candidates in general found it difficult to process more complex information about the new arrangements, struggling to identify which pieces of information were relevant to each of the headings and the additional information given in each section. For example, players being transported in cars with darkened windows (item 5.2a) was sometimes interpreted as being a measure to mitigate hot weather, as opposed to ensuring player privacy. The removal of disruptive spectators (item 5.3) was sometimes seen as a player privacy issue, rather than a problem related to the behaviour of spectators. The information provided in each section seemed to be either ignored or deemed not very useful to weaker candidates, who might have had problems in comprehending the statements.

Weaker candidates also struggled due to a limited range of vocabulary. For example, when asked about the dietary requirements of Lara Taranova (item 5.7a), they were unable to note down that Lara does not eat pork, or realise that the words 'diet' and 'dietary' are related. Despite being one of the best-answered items, the international phone number for enquiries (item 5.8) proved to be a pitfall for weaker candidates. Though the long sequence of numbers was repeated on the recording, weaker candidates tended to mix up the order of the numbers. Finally, the item about Cooling Fans (item 5.1c) was answered very well, possibly as this was clearly illustrated and related to the temperature of the players in the text on page 8 of the Data File.

### Task 6

Candidates were required to write an announcement to persuade readers to join the Tennis Activity Day. They were instructed to refer to the email exchange, the feedback interview, the minutes from the Victoria Cup Committee meeting and notes from the Zoom meeting to do the task. Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the genre, including an appropriate opening paragraph to encourage interest, and were able to follow the given prompts to complete the task. The difficulty of this task was comparable with Task 5, with an overall mean of 39.7%.

The strongest candidates could locate, manipulate and organise the information into an announcement. They began the text by drawing the readers' attention to the fact that the Tennis Activity Day would be a significant event this year and reminding the readers not to miss the opportunity to meet the tennis star Lara Taranova. Some candidates showed very good reader awareness by encouraging tennis fans to apply, while acknowledging exclusivity as the Activity Day could only admit five families (item 6.7).

Even weaker candidates were able to use a tone and language that was informal to mention when and where the event would take place (items 6.2 and 6.3) and what the participants could do on that day (items 6.4 to 6.6). They tended to neglect the detail, though, that the text was for Events Horizon's website and instead treated the task as preparing a verbal announcement to be delivered at something like a morning assembly or other gathering, thus undermining their appropriacy mark.

A challenging part of Task 6 was for candidates to adapt the information from the feedback interview to focus on what would happen at this year's Tennis Activity Day. Many candidates were able to attempt the task, but struggled to produce a concise written text, instead including verbatim commentary ('it was wonderful'; 'it was really helpful') and irrelevant information ('this part wasn't popular') related to the previous year's Activity Day feedback in their writing. Many candidates mentioned, for example, that parents would have a chance to 'test our serve against a real tennis pro' when this activity was not recommended. Difficult items related to only five families being chosen this year (item 6.7) and to the fact that the families that applied were required to have children between 12-16 years old (item 6.8). Other than the age requirement, the children in the family also had to submit two sentences explaining why they would like to meet Lara Taranova to join the selection process (item 6.9). Many candidates either misinterpreted or could not adequately state these requirements.

#### Task 7

In Task 7, candidates were asked to write a letter to the editor in response to the article published in the *Hong Kong Press & Journal*. The article was about the Victoria Cup. The writer of the article pointed out the problem of littering after last year's tournament and was concerned that tennis fans would not be able to watch the tennis games on local TV this year. Candidates had to use the job advertisement, the blog website, the minutes of the committee meeting and notes from the Zoom meeting to do the task. Generally, candidates struggled with this task, as can be seen from the relatively low mean of 29.5%.

This task was a strong test of whether candidates could analyse and successfully adopt information from a table and a chart into a relevant written text and thereby refute the arguments made in the article. Many candidates seemed to find difficulty in identifying and using the relevant information from the chart (items 7.1b and c). This bar chart appeared on the blog page and compared the number of anti-littering signs and no smoking signs in 2021 with 2020. Stronger candidates were able to interpret the information and relate the chart to the measures on the problem of littering; weaker candidates tended to copy all information – including the number of hamburger outlets – without any consideration of the relevance to the task.

Candidates performed better on items related to the table (items 7.3a and b), which referred to the Victoria Cup TV listings. Stronger candidates were able to reassure readers that the situation was not as bad as the article writer claimed in that tennis fans still had the chance to watch the most important games on local TV. Weaker candidates tended to simply report all the broadcasting dates rather than using the information to refute the argument made in the article.

Another improvement measure was the hiring of 35 Green Ambassadors (item 7.2a). Stronger candidates were able to use the information in the advertisement to show how the organisers were tackling the littering and smoking problems (items 7.2b to d). Weaker candidates tended not to re-word the questions in the advertisement or use that information to explain the job duties of the ambassadors. They instead copied indiscriminately from the advertisement and did not relate the information to the problems.

#### Part B2

In Part B2, candidates were required to write three texts in the role of Nico Lin to assist in the organising of the Victoria Cup, a professional women's tennis tournament. The texts were: an email to the charity Refugee Sanctuary, a letter to the editor in response to complaints about the tournament, and an email to the PR department explaining the rationale behind a redesign of a promotional poster. In addition to identifying relevant information from the texts provided, candidates would need to produce an organised and coherent text that was appropriate to the indicated genre and audience, with accurate English. Information on which to base their answers was provided in a Data File of texts, including an email, a notice to charities, input from Google Forms, minutes of a committee meeting, a letter to the editor of the *Hong Kong Press and Journal*, a transcript of a phone conversation, a news article and an interview appearing in an online magazine. The Data File also included a note-taking sheet, with subheadings, where candidates could record information from a recording of a Zoom meeting.

The candidates' performance is summarised in Table 6:

Table 6: Paper 3 Part B2 results

Task	Full Mark	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (%)
8	16	47.0	21.3
9	19	46.9	20.3
10	18	46.9	20.2

From Table 6 above, it can be seen that the performance of the candidates was similar across all tasks. The overall mean was 46.9% for all of Part B2. The paper proved to be successful in discriminating weaker from stronger candidates and in terms of its own internal reliability.

#### Task 8

In Task 8, candidates were required to write an email to Gilbert Bayo at the charity Refugee Sanctuary. They needed to explain why the charity was not chosen to provide volunteer ball kids for the Victoria Cup tournament and ways that both Events Horizon and Lara Taranova would help them instead. It was possible for the text to be written to Gilbert in a more formal register as this would be the first time that Nico Lin had contacted him. The mean of this task (47.0%) was comparable with those of the other tasks in Part B2. Most candidates were able to organise a coherent text in two main parts: explaining the job requirements that the charity failed to meet, and then the details of what Events Horizon and Lara had offered to do.

Items 8.2b (the donation amount) and 8.3 (Lara's proposed visit to the charity) proved particularly challenging. Candidates mixed up the 'we' in the Zoom meeting for Events Horizon, when in fact it was the agent speaking on behalf of Lara. Item 8.3 also came from the listening input and only the strongest candidates were able to recognise the relevance of this information and incorporate it in their text. Many candidates also struggled with the idea - or else struggled to express the idea - that the naming of the gym (item 8.2d) was a condition of the donation, not merely a suggestion or recommendation.

It is worth noting some issues with relevance and appropriacy in Items 8.1a and 8.1b. Candidates were required to explain to Refugee Sanctuary, a charity, why their application had been unsuccessful. It would be inappropriate for them to make comparisons between the two charity organisations which had shown interest in participating. Weaker candidates did not seem to understand the need to approach the task tactfully and a lack of reader awareness was sometimes evident. It would be inappropriate, for example, to tell Refugee Sanctuary that they were not good enough, or to over-emphasise why the other charity was better. It would also be irrelevant for Gilbert to read about where the children his charity helps come from and the services his charity provide for these children. This indiscriminate copying from the Data File was observed, which had a negative impact on candidates' appropriacy mark.

Stronger candidates were better able to manipulate the Data File and listening input, and were able to successfully incorporate the content into their own writing. This included converting informal language from the Zoom meeting so that it was appropriately and accurately presented in their text. These candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of their role and reader awareness by thanking Gilbert for his charity's interest and tactfully explaining the job requirements the charity failed to meet. They tended to end the email with a short concluding paragraph to establish a warm and cordial relationship through showing regret for the rejection and hopes for future co-operation.

#### Task 9

Candidates were required to write a response to a letter to the editor from Ms Geeta Singh. Candidates had to identify relevant information by synthesising information from the Data File and the listening input. They then needed to present the information using an appropriate register. Stronger candidates

were able to locate and summarise the main points concisely, logically organise the information and avoid including irrelevant information. At 46.9%, the mean of this task was comparable with the other tasks in Part B2.

Most candidates started the letter with a reference to Ms Singh's letter. Weaker candidates addressed the letter to Ms Singh directly, which suggested a lack of genre awareness. One other challenge that candidates encountered related to the higher-level skill of constructing a clear criticism and refutation structure in the text. For example, Ms Singh claimed that most of the tickets were reserved for sponsors and their guests (item 9.1a). Candidates had to read carefully to determine if this criticism was justified. Based on the evidence available in the Data File, they would have realised that it was not, and so they had to communicate this clearly in the text (item 9.1b). Stronger candidates were able to refute this accusation and signal the other complaints and actions to be taken by the organiser clearly to the reader. They were also able to maintain audience awareness throughout the text. Some candidates were inconsistent in their use of verb tenses, which could lead to a lack of clarity in meaning, particularly when explaining the decision that the committee had reached about punctuality (item 9.2b).

One key part of the content regarding ticket re-allocation came from the transcript of the phone conversation on p.8 of the Data File. Stronger candidates were able to successfully locate the relevant details and summarise them, but less able candidates seemed to overlook some of the detail and relied on copying complete sentences. This showed that they did not successfully demonstrate an ability to manipulate language from the Data File and led to the production of overly-long, irrelevant sections of text.

Stronger candidates were able to manipulate the Data File and successfully incorporate Data File content and listening input into their own writing. Weaker candidates had problems with organisation, reader awareness, and inconsistency in grammatical accuracy and register. This was often the result of copying directly from the Data File.

#### Task 10

In this task, candidates were instructed to write an internal email to a colleague in another department asking him to redesign a promotional poster. Candidates were asked to make it very clear to the colleague, Alfred Roi, how the current poster had failed to meet the requirements stipulated by the sponsor and how it should be redesigned. The mean of this task was comparable with the other tasks in Part B2 at 46.9%.

Most candidates were able to produce a relevant, concise, and appropriate email explaining the problems of the current promotional poster. In terms of specific content, items 10.2a and 10.2b – related to the requirements of the sponsor – seemed to be challenging to most candidates. Stronger candidates were able to realise the importance of meeting the sponsor's expectations and to correctly interpret the criticisms made against the poster, before informing Alfred how the poster should be redesigned.

The mark for coherence and organisation depended heavily on the candidate's ability to use the various information in the Data File and on the recording to build an argument for the need to redesign the poster. The appropriacy of the candidate's work greatly depended on the extent to which they understood their role and the context of the text. Stronger candidates organised the email with a suitable opening paragraph to orientate Alfred, with a preview of the issue under discussion, and a closing paragraph which included some recognition of the work of his department. Weaker candidates, however, did not seem to understand that they both worked in the same company and introduced themselves as being from Events Horizon. The shortcomings of the poster and how they should be changed were expressed like orders given to a sub-contractor. The tone and register adopted would be inappropriate to the task.

#### Recommendations for Part B

Candidates were broadly familiar with the genres tested in this paper and showed confidence in organising relevant details to complete the tasks. Many opening and closing paragraphs were a clear indication that candidates had understood their role and the context of the task well. Stronger candidates were able to locate, interpret and adapt relevant information in the listening input and the Data File. However, content points which required careful reading and interpretation were still challenging to most.



Weaker candidates tended to rely on copying chunks of text from the Data File, with varying levels of success depending on the points being attempted. An important skill for candidates is to be able to paraphrase or summarise key information where appropriate. Candidates are also advised to read for inference carefully and make links between the summarised information and the rest of the text.

### **School-based Assessment Report (SBA)**

This year, due to the suspension of face-to-face classes for part of the academic year, schools were required to submit only one mark for SBA from either Part A or Part B, and individual presentation or group interaction could be used as the mode of assessment.

The total number of students who participated in SBA this year was 43,457 with a total of 475 moderation groups. The mean of the moderated SBA mark was 65.9%, slightly higher than that of 2020, with a standard deviation of 17.4%. Based on the statistical moderation reports and the district coordinators' reports, the marks submitted by the schools were generally accurate and reliable. The marks submitted by 75.8% of the schools were in the 'as expected' category, 15.3% were in the 'higher than expected' category and 8.8% were in the 'lower than expected' category. Teachers were slightly more lenient in their grading, especially when grading average and above average students and their marks had to be moderated accordingly.

#### **Individual Presentation**

Students had prepared well for their assessment and were able to do the required tasks. Competent students had a good command of the language and used appropriate vocabulary and accurate language structures to express their ideas which were well developed with supporting details and organised in a logical manner. They spoke clearly and fluently with appropriate intonation, were natural in their delivery, and were able to engage the listeners' interest. When they were asked questions, they had no difficulty in giving a reasonable reply. Overall, the majority performed well in all four domains.

It was however noted that a number of students who had a good standard of English appeared to have memorised their presentations and this affected their performance. They would have given a more natural presentation with better intonation and communication strategies had they simply presented their ideas based on some brief notes and may have achieved higher scores.

Many of the less competent students wrote out their whole speech on their note-cards and simply read it out. A few were able to read satisfactorily but the majority still had problems in articulating words and using appropriate intonation and pacing, which made their presentations difficult to follow. Others put too many ideas in their presentations and read at a very fast pace in order to finish what they had prepared. In general, students who were less competent lacked the necessary vocabulary and language structures to express their ideas and often made errors which impeded understanding. Some presentations were rather short.

It needs to be reiterated that the focus of SBA is on developing and assessing the speaking ability of students, so students should not memorise or read aloud their scripted presentations.

#### **Group Interaction**

As most schools submitted marks for individual presentations this year, samples for group interactions were limited. The more capable students performed well and had some understanding of discussion skills. They were able to maintain appropriate interaction and used varied communication strategies like turn-taking, contributing and asking for opinions, responding to other members and summarising. The ideas were relevant and presented clearly and fluently with the use of appropriate and accurate vocabulary and language structures, and they only referred to their note-cards occasionally.

Students at the other end of the spectrum did not perform satisfactorily as they were too dependent on their note-cards. Some just read out what they had written without paying attention to what the other group members had said so the discussions were frequently incoherent. There was little real interaction

although some formulaic expressions like 'I agree with you.' and 'What do you think?' were frequently used indiscriminately.

### Recommendations

In order to perform better and to truly benefit from SBA, students should pay attention to the following recommendations:

Students should read the assessment criteria carefully so that they can understand what they need to do in order to achieve a higher score. They need to find out which domains they are weak in and work on making improvement in one particular domain at a time. This step-by-step approach will help them gradually perform better and achieve higher overall scores in SBA.

In the preparation stage, students need to read the task carefully and brainstorm some ideas for the task. They should choose two to three main ideas and think of supporting/additional details for each. The key words of these main ideas and supporting details should be written down on their note-cards. Then students should rehearse what they plan to say a few times and time themselves to make sure that they can complete everything within the given time. They should pay attention to how they link their ideas so that the presentation is coherent. They could also record themselves so that they can evaluate their own performance. These rehearsals are important as they can help students practise their presentations and build up their confidence so that they will be able to give a better presentation with only occasional reference to their note-cards during the actual assessment. However, over-rehearsal could be counter-productive as it may make their presentations stilted and lead to memorisation which may result in low marks in all the four domains.

Students need to spend more time on building up their English foundation. They need to accurately pronounce and know the meaning of the vocabulary that they use. In addition, they need to constantly add useful words that they come across to their existing vocabulary bank. When they notice a word which they find useful, they should write it down in a notebook, check its meaning and pronunciation as well as how it is used. They can use an online dictionary which provides not only the meaning but also the pronunciation of the word. Paying attention to how sentences are constructed is important too. In doing so, their English will improve gradually and they can then do better in SBA.

The use of appropriate communication strategies plays an important role in oral communication and is one of the domains that are assessed. For individual presentations, students need to make use of appropriate body language to engage the audience. During group interactions, in addition to the above, they need to interact with their group members and make use of different strategies, for example, turn taking, responding, making suggestions etc, to maintain the flow of the interaction. Students should therefore refer to the assessment criteria for group interaction (Domain II) and make a list of the different communication strategies mentioned and then practise using a few every time they have a chance to do discussions. As they become familiar with using different communication strategies, they will be able to use them naturally when they are being assessed.

The final recommendation is that students should be more proactive and take the initiative to speak more English whenever possible. They should volunteer to answer questions and share their ideas and opinions in class and they should also take an active part in class discussions. By speaking more English, they are practising their speaking skills and the more practice they have, the more confident they will become in using English to communicate with others.