

2020 VCE English written examination report

General comments

The 2020 VCE English examination was consistent in its presentation of the three sections of the course. Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text offered students the choice of two distinct topics for each of the 20 texts and students were required to complete one response. Section B – Comparative analysis of texts asked students to meaningfully compare the ideas and issues in a chosen pair of texts. Section C – Argument and persuasive language required students to analyse the ways in which argument and language was used by young farmer, Warwick Bandle, in his speech on the impact of tourist drones in the Byways Shire.

More than 41 000 students sat for the 2020 VCE English examination and most demonstrated competence in the range of knowledge and skills. Most students were able to present three completed pieces of writing that demonstrated an understanding of their texts and showed some degree of competence in analysing argument. They tended to write at length, but there was a greater dependence on summary, restatement and quotation at the expense of analysis of ideas. This may have been a reflection of the uncertainties generated by the disrupted year. There were very few incomplete and/or blank answers, and students generally displayed a sound command of essay structure and many gave indications of a strong textual knowledge, particularly in Section A.

A reminder to teachers that the assessment of English is global and norm-referenced. It is based on criterion-referenced descriptors, which are applied holistically and reflect the assessor's consideration of the whole answer. There is no such thing as the 'right' answer – the assessors make judgments about the unique qualities of what is written by each student, understanding that this is first draft writing completed under the time constraints of an examination.

The following three general observations about the 2020 VCE English examination deserve attention.

- As addressed in close detail in the Section A report that follows, students must answer the question on the paper; this is of critical importance and applies across all parts of the examination. It is difficult to reward a clearly competent student who has ignored the ideas posed by the set question and is instead responding to last year's topic, or a SAC topic they completed earlier in the year or a question from one of the trial examinations. Relevance to the topic is of primary importance in each section of the examination.
- There is a difference between 'preparing answers' and 'preparing well' for the examination. Students should prepare well and develop their own responses, which may be influenced by their reading and teaching, but which should ultimately reflect their own authentic ideas about the text.
- Many students tended to fall back on detailed summary, restatement and paraphrasing of texts and Section C material, accompanied by lengthy and, in many cases, unnecessarily extensive, quotation. Students should develop the confidence to let go of their detailed, close knowledge of texts and only use material that is relevant to the topic question. Assessors will reward the students' views, interpretations and arguments on the ideas identified in the topic. Knowledge of the text will be assessed on the judicious choice of material to discuss and quote. There is no benefit in retelling the story or summarising the author's views and values in general.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Analytical interpretation of a text

For many students, the work undertaken in preparation for Section A of the exam was their first experience of remote learning. Students were well-prepared with both the knowledge and skills to complete this section of the examination with confidence.

This year the most popular texts were *Rear Window*, *Station Eleven*, *Nine Days*, *The Women of Troy* and *The Golden Age*.

Section A is holistically assessed. The assessment criteria require students to demonstrate a knowledge of the ideas and issues explored in the text in relation to the topic. They also require the use of textual evidence, analysis and control of form and language in the response. A well-structured and fluent essay is more likely to successfully convey complex ideas. Equally, complex ideas are best conveyed by apt and precise language. The knowledge and skills required are not independent of each other.

Some students relied on pre-prepared responses. Teachers and students should be cognisant of the second dot point in each of the expected qualities, which focuses on the student's capacity to respond to the topic. Relevance to the topic is a distinguishing quality in determining the student's level of success.

Students should be careful about the content they select to support their reading of the text. Inevitably, there will be content that students cannot discuss. Many students did demonstrate a capacity to successfully distinguish between evidence that was and was not relevant to the topic.

While some students demonstrated an astute understanding of what response a question was inviting, others did not consider the whole topic. All topics require students to write in an analytical/expository form. Students need to create a clear structure as a framework to present their response. Many students were able to do this. Lower-scoring responses tended to merely list examples of a single idea relating to the topic, or conflated ideas presented in the topic, or omitted key ideas. Mid-range responses were able to construct an argument about the explicit ideas presented in the text that was relevant to the topic. They presented a clear argument that was reasoned and developed a point of view that was appropriately supported by a variety of textual evidence. High-scoring responses were able to consider the explicit ideas presented in the texts, but also address the implied tension in a topic. These essays demonstrated considered thinking in relation to the topic, an awareness of the nuance of language in the topic, and a capacity to present an analysis of structural and language elements that supported the personal reading of the text they had developed.

A response that scored in the low range to the question 'The characters in *Rear Window* crave companionship and belonging. To what extent do you agree?' may have discussed companionship only or have interpreted 'companionship' as romance. Such a student may have ignored the concept of belonging or conflated the terms 'companionship and belonging' and not indicated an understanding of these two related, but different, concepts. In some cases, a student may have been so determined to present a discussion of voyeurism that they twisted the topic in an effort to present information about that concept.

In a mid-range response to the question 'In *The Women of Troy*, men seek to control the lives of women. Discuss.', a student may have only considered that control was achieved by violence and not considered the many ways in which control was exercised or the implications of the word 'seek' in the question. They would have been able to use the text to support the argument they presented. A mid-range response may have had

some very good analysis in relation to the topic, but some sections of the essay may have been less relevant to the topic.

A high-scoring response to the question 'Every time you see someone, you never know if you're seeing them for the last time. How does *Nine Days* emphasise the importance of cherishing those we love?' would have understood that a 'how' question, such as this, invites a discussion of writing technique (as does the word 'emphasise') as well as a discussion of ideas. It would have demonstrated a knowledge of the ideas, as well as the structural and language elements referenced by the quote and included that in their discussion. A high-scoring response would have considered the term 'importance' as the basis for a discussion of ideas, and considered the nuance associated with the word 'cherishing' as well as the many concepts pertaining to 'love' presented in the text. All of this knowledge (without extraneous material) would have been presented in a strategically sequenced argument, well supported by close language analysis, as well as a discussion of ideas.

Advice to students and teachers

- Students should have a clear understanding of what aspect of the text is being interrogated by the topic. Teachers might give special consideration to the verbs used in the topic as a way of increasing the relevance of student responses.
- Furthermore, students are reminded that responses scored 8 and above are essays that have considered the implications of the topic.
- Students should substantiate their responses with apt and precise evidence. Demonstrating an understanding of the many ways in which texts convey ideas indicates a well-prepared student. The capacity to demonstrate analysis of textual elements, or how an idea is conveyed by an author, is rewarded.
- Relevance is key. A student must be ready to show mental agility and respond to a previously unseen topic.
- All essay questions require students to respond in an analytical/expository style using formal language. The appropriate use of metalanguage enables complex ideas to be communicated clearly and fluently.

The following example of a high-scoring response demonstrates the student's capacity to consider a previously unseen topic and develop a sustained and thoughtful response that addresses the question and presents an insightful reading of the text.

'This will pass. Everything passes.'

Station Eleven offers the hope that civilisation will endure.

Do you agree?

Although Emily St John Mandel's dystopic fiction may at first appear to be an indictment of the modern world, the novel ultimately serves as a celebration of humanity and the ability of the world to restore itself. Despite the difficult early years of the cataclysmic 'Georgia Flu', the destruction of the present world ushers in a new order in which the restoration of human connection, art and nature are in some ways able to create a world better than that of before.

While upon the fall of civilization many were most struck by the downfall of modern communication and technology, the new world order is in many ways a return to a time in which connections are stronger and more valued. Through a shifting narrative, Mandel is able to directly compare the worlds of both before and after the pandemic. While the world before collapse is defined by individuality, the story tracking a few key individuals, the world twenty years after collapse focusses on communities and found families such as the Travelling Symphony and the settlement at the Severn City Airport. In the time pre-collapse, Mandel focusses on the dysfunctionality of relationships in both the personal and corporate contexts. Arthur Leander, whose story bookends the novel, rues the fact that he has 'three ex-wives – a sign of [having gone] significantly wrong'. Furthermore, Arthur's first wife Miranda's story is defined by personal strength having been hurt by both her abusive ex Pablo, and by Arthur. Miranda declares 'I repent nothing' as she retreats

from relationships to throw herself into her work and her art – a solitary project. By contrast, the new world is one in which meaningful connections are not just beneficial, but essential to survival. Mandel celebrates the return and endurance of community through the Travelling Symphony. Although the Symphony ‘faces the same problems as every group of people’, aggrieved by ‘petty jealousies’ and ‘simmering resentment’, ultimately ‘the Symphony was their only home’ – a rare source of safety in an unhinged world. The community at the Severn City Airport is another means by which Mandel champions the endurance of human connection and community. Although the former passengers and travellers are initially wary of the strangers around them, as the irrevocability of the global collapse sets in they begin to view one another as ‘compatriots’. When the group sent out from the airport on day one hundred return they are ‘overcome with relief’ at being ‘home’. Furthermore, the tearful arrival of the man who ‘thought [he] was the only [person] left’ emphasises that the fall of modernity has seen a return to the value of community. Therefore, by comparing the world of both pre and post collapse, Mandel celebrates the ability of community as a facet of civilization to overcome adversity.

Another element of which Mandel celebrates the survival of is art and artistic expression. While it seems unlikely that a world in which all structures of modernity have fallen can be pre-occupied with the experience of art, the Travelling Symphony celebrate humanity and ‘what’s best of the world’ by performing the plays of Shakespeare and classical music. The endurance of civilization across centuries is shown by Mandel through the universal relevance of Shakespeare’s work. While plays like ‘King Lear’ directly mirror the themes of apocalypse and plague, celebratory works like ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, first performed at the Globe Theatre after ‘two seasons of plague’, ‘centuries ago on a different continent’ continues to provide people with ‘a beautiful respite from the cares’ of the world in Year Twenty. The transcendence of art beyond time and circumstance, symbolic of the endurance of civilization, is also presented by Mandel through the way the ‘Station Eleven’ comics connect Kirsten and Miranda across the years. While Miranda pens the lines ‘We only long to go home’ as a means to process a sense of displacement in her life in the modern world, Kirsten finds solace in that same line as an articulation of her longing for the world lost. Despite having no memory of who Kirsten was or why she wrote the ‘Station Eleven’ comics, Kirsten’s interpretation and value of the texts reinforces Mandel’s presentation of art as a transcendent power by which civilization endures.

Finally, the hope of the endurance and perseverance of civilization is revealed in the restoration of the natural world, which is revealed to be part of the cyclical world order. In a world in which modernity has fallen, Mandel celebrates the restoration of the natural environment as a return to a world in which there is balance between humanity and nature. Mandel’s elegy for the former globalized world, one of ‘detrious’, ‘excess’ and ‘garbage’, is interspersed with poetic descriptions of ‘wildflowers on the side of the road ... dots like a painting’, and ‘a monarch butterfly floating past ... the sounds of life all around ..’. Even in the most dire moments in this ‘blood-drenched world’ the appreciation of nature is celebrated. As Kirsten faces imminent death at the hands of the Prophet, she looks ‘beyond him’ to take in ‘the brilliant blue sky, [and the] leaves blowing in the wind’, dispelling patterns of light. The celebration of a return to nature is furthered by Mandel as her depiction of the old world, the one in which we live today, is overwhelmingly superficial. As Jeevan climbs to the stage to attempt to save Arthur’s life, he is taken aback by the ‘plastic snow’ that continually falls and ‘clings to his jacket’ while Arthur dies beneath him. Furthermore, the ‘bright, white lights’ and ‘cavenous space instead of a ceiling’ is noted by Jeevan, who pities Arthur for his death in such an impersonal, superficial setting as his ‘soul [might] ... eerily slip out’. Thus Mandel celebrates the natural world and its restorative nature as an element of survival alongside civilization and humanity.

Emily St John Mandel’s ‘Station Eleven’ ultimately concludes that whilst ‘everything passes’, the cyclical, restorative nature of the world allows civilization and humanity to endure. As Clarke and Kirsten watch the ‘pinpricks of light’ on the horizon, Mandel celebrates a world waking up from the darkness of the fall, made all the better for an improved appreciation for human connection, artistic expression and the natural world.

Section B – Comparative analysis of texts

Most students are well aware of the requirements of this section. The four assessment criteria require students to demonstrate selective textual knowledge and appreciation of core ideas and issues in their paired texts to explore meaningful textual connections, similarities or differences in response to the topic and to reveal control of language to facilitate such comparison. As in all sections of the examination, assessment is holistic, hence student capacity to develop a coherent and cogent essay that directly addresses the chosen topic, and is substantiated by sharp textual comparison, is rewarded. There is no preferred or stipulated style of essay writing in Section B. Rather, students should adopt the approach that most adeptly enables them to compare the ideas and issues central to the topic with meaning, clarity and control.

The two most popular pairings were Pair 5, *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker*, and Pair 7, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *The Longest Memory*. In each topic, the instruction to ‘compare’ indicated that comparison is at the heart of this task, with nine questions posing the direction ‘compare the ways’ and the remaining seven questions asking students to ‘compare how’. Therefore, it is expected that students analyse how each text presents and explores the central idea or issue.

The most assured responses revealed a close consideration of the wording of all the selected topic, since no words in a topic are redundant. Four of the topics were centred around textual quotations from both texts, which always exemplified the essential idea to be considered. In another four topics, this issue was encapsulated through a proposition, for example ‘The conflict between personal feeling and public duty always leads to a dilemma’ (*The Queen and Ransom*). The remaining eight topics required students to directly compare ideas, for example ‘Compare the ways in which the two texts show the suffering of the innocent and the guilty’ (*The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker*) or ‘Compare how *Stasiland* and *Never Let Me Go* explore the importance of love and connection’. Teachers need to ensure that students are familiar with, and experienced in, addressing different styles of question, always focusing their comparison on the ways in which both texts convey the idea or issue.

The highest-scoring responses, in keeping with the criteria, added meaning to the core issue or idea in the selected topic with clarity, confidence and insight. Such essays revealed a capacity to approach the question in a richly conceptual manner, which is a characteristic of the upper range of responses, as reflected in the published expected qualities. They also compared the texts in a measured and controlled manner, reflecting assured analysis of both. This reflected an awareness that each topic is not a general prompt, but rather a carefully constructed, direct topic for students to fully address. Such a skilful approach is observable through the careful and controlled use of sharply focused topic sentences, such as ‘Both Frears and Malouf postulate that grief is an impetus for change’ or ‘*The Longest Memory* and *The 7 Stages of Grieving* implore the necessity of telling stories to pass on culture and heritage as we fight to change and deal with grief and hope for a better life’. These responses use considered and controlled metalanguage to compare the texts and to convey ideas through discussion of relevant textual events and protagonists.

The following extract from a high-scoring response to the first question on *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *The Longest Memory* reveals such traits.

Throughout history, minority groups have continuously been suppressed and subsequently lose their sense of power ... In both texts, the writers portray the affiliations between those deemed ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ to be largely dictated by one’s race and expose how such prejudices deprive minority groups of their rights to their identities. Additionally, both the play and novel demonstrate the debilitating nature of oppressive figures who often cause immense grievances and pains for those lacking power ...

Furthermore, the trio of authors condemn the ignorance of white power’s actions in causing a cycle of grief for minority groups that is so often debilitating, that it prevents them from withstanding their oppressive powers. Though both texts adopt a non-linear narrative to depict the ongoing cycle of oppression, D’Aguiar utilises a more depressive language style that offers his readers with limited vestiges of relief, unlike the play that provides instances of humour such as in ‘Murri gets a dress’, which is delivered in the style of stand-up comedy ...

Thus while The 7 Stages of Grieving concludes with a slightly more hopeful future of equality in relationships than The Longest Memory, both texts underpin the immense intergenerational trauma that is inevitably present in their respective societies ...

This excerpt reveals meaningful textual comparison, which is driven by the topic focus on 'the powerful and the powerless' and supported by close analysis and a continual explicit conceptual focus.

Likewise, the following extract from another high-scoring response to the second topic on *The Crucible* and *The Dressmaker* has many assured attributes.

... Within the classist societies of Salem and Dungatar, that are governed by highly repressive patriarchies, there was no room for social advancement and women were to be dependent on men in the roles of wives, mothers and illicit lovers. Ham and Miller portray the reversal of these conventional sexual stereotypes through women who choose to follow their desire or use their pain from suffering from victimisation as a weapon to destroy 'the norm' ... Whilst Ham portrays the injustice Tilly suffers after returning to Dungatar, it is Miller who shows that Abigail threatens the patriarchy as a woman who suffered from victimisation.

Those who are lower in social class, suffer as a result of judgement and become convenient scapegoats by those in power. This dangerously toxic situation is perpetuated when these fear based belief systems threaten social order, hence justifying judgement ...

Those who fear to be judged, for the maintenance of their reputation, ultimately destroy others which leads to their own suffering. This is portrayed when leadership is corrupted for its own selfish needs and not the interests of all constituents ...

When patriarchy is dominated, leaders choose violence and oppression to cause suffering to obstruct those who are defenceless. Bigoted authorities use and abuse their power and cause suffering through their demanding temperament ...

In conclusion, within the patriarchal dominated societies of Salem and Dungatar, the suffering of the innocent and guilty is evident as the powerful always suffer from guilt being power hungry and those who are innocent suffer as a result of their vulnerability.

This extract demonstrates the capacity of the student to step back from the events and characters in both texts to compare them in a conceptual manner with topic focus and resolution.

Less confident and complex student responses often were too heavily dependent on recounting textual examples and the actions of characters, thereby limiting their capacity to focus on the essential ideas and issues. These students had difficulty in clearly and precisely articulating the ideas they sought to explore. Another feature of these responses was a lack of precision and clarity in the comments being made. Therefore, such responses were frequently limited in their effectiveness due to a lack of meaningful comparative commentary and a consequential inability to adeptly juxtapose the two texts in response to the actual topic. Above all else, such responses are often burdened by excessive textual description, with a lack of control of the textual material cited.

Students are advised to consider the best way to open their essays and each paragraph so that the focus is on the ideas and issues central to the topic. Establishing a strong conceptual basis at the outset and then reinforcing this at the end of each paragraph is advisable. While students should use a dictionary to clarify the precise meaning of words in the topic, as well as their own expression, they should not explicitly cite a dictionary definition. Where two elements are incorporated in the topic, for example 'show the suffering of the innocent and the guilty', 'the importance of love and connection or 'personal feeling and public duty', both need to be explored and juxtaposed.

Teachers should consider how changing one set text in a pairing may alter the ideas and issues for comparison. It is important that students are encouraged to explore a wide variety of key ideas and issues explored in both texts, and to examine how these arise. Assessors reward an 'insightful grasp' of 'meaningful connections, similarities or differences', revealed through sharp textual analysis, which conceptually address the question.

Section C — Argument and persuasive language

Responses in Section C were generally substantial, and students managed the single article accompanied by two graphics with assurance. The main piece for analysis was the transcript of a speech, delivered by a young farmer at a public meeting, who argued that uncontrolled recreational drone usage was posing significant problems for local landowners, and called on the Shire Council to act swiftly in response. There were two slides projected onto a screen to accompany his presentation and support his arguments. The straightforward nature of the material allowed students clear entry into the identification and analysis of argument and language. Nearly all students could identify the farmer's basic contention, and the connection between the visuals and the speech.

This task required students to closely consider the given material, the speech and the two graphics, and examine the ways in which argument and language operate together to persuade a target audience to share a specific point of view. Most students could identify Warwick Bandle's concerns about drones impacting the farmers' livelihoods; however, higher-scoring students could see a wider complexity in his stance that drones also offered advantages to the farming community. This was more than a simplistic demand for banning tourists' use of drones; it was a considered argument for the broader need to change legislation regarding drone ownership. Students were expected to approach the speech in a holistic manner, asking themselves how it persuaded its mixed audience of local farmers, Byways Shire councillors, and a smaller component of tourists, through a deliberately constructed combination of argument and language.

Nearly all students showed sound comprehension of the material itself and were able to demonstrate their understanding of the arguments of Warwick Bandle. Many middle-range students wrote clear, contextual introductions that reflected this understanding, as shown in the following excerpt.

In an attempt to persuade the local community to take action against recreational drones, young farmer, Warwick Bandle gave a speech at a public meeting called by the Byways Shire Council. In this speech, given to Council members and members of the local community, Bandle contends that recreational drones are a threat to local farmers and recreational drone users should be educated and regulated at a stricter level.

The highest-scoring responses identified the overall purpose and intended audiences of the speech, and used this as the context to structure their analysis around the key stages of the respective arguments and their purpose in positioning the reader. They did this before closely analysing the particular language and persuasive devices used, as shown in the following excerpt.

As the ease and availability of sophisticated technological devices surges, many have begun to question the consequences of such free reign on the lives of others. Notably, Warwick Bandle, a young farmer from regional Victoria, speaking to his local council – Byways Shire – to voice the concerns of his fellow community members regarding the invasive and often destructive use of drones by visitors to the region. He supports his assertions that in order to protect its residents and their livelihoods, the Council should prohibit unilateral drone flying, with two accompanying slideshow images. Bandle employs a collegial yet critical tone, addressing not only his direct audience of those present at the Council meeting, but more indirectly, those tourists responsible for the drone flying, to present his message with efficacy – in the hope that direct action, and responsibility, will be taken.

While there was confidence in identifying the broader argument, many students needed to focus on the ways in which Warwick Bandle structured and sequenced his supporting arguments and consciously and deliberately used language to position his audience in particular ways. Identification of argument is only the first step in the analysis process; however, many students struggled to move beyond this into analysis mode. There was a pattern to these summary responses and teachers might find it useful to look carefully at the language some students use when attempting to analyse arguments. The pattern of comments such as 'he speaks about', 'he then goes onto', 'he talks about' and 'he mentions that' are clear indicators that the student is simply summarising and restating argument, not analysing it.

The following excerpt from a high-scoring response shows that the student has not just identified an argument but is tracking its development through close consideration of the speaker's tone and language choices, always keeping in mind the intended impact on the audience.

From the outset, Bandle overlays a logistics argument to candidly illustrate the magnitude of the drone crisis. Indeed, his repeated use of question marks immediately draws on an urgency that appeals to more concerned farmers, framing the issue as severe and worthy of their immediate attention. Subsequently, he taps into the implied destruction of 'crashing out of the sky', with its cataclysmic associations of a meteorite, to cultivate a sense of fear and trepidation in more apprehensive local residents. In tandem with the emphatic 'Just imagine' – with its associations of endless possibilities – Bandle suggests the damage wreaked by the drones could devastate all levels of the community. The speaker then shifts to a more impartial tone as he intersperses the objective description, 'when it's swept up, damaging the harvester'. Thus, he leads more logic-inclined farmers through a chain of reasoning; positioning them to equate 'drones' with exorbitant damage to equipment. Accordingly, he coaxingly galvanises these residents to view the recreational use of drones as an impending threat, and thus enthusiastically support its ban.

Most students could identify and describe the main arguments used by both writers but often had difficulty taking the next step to analyse how they were functioning within the overall text. Instead, many fell into lengthy descriptions of what Bandle said, supported by many quotations from his speech. This was particularly evident when addressing the final section of his argument calling for legislative changes to licensing drone users. It was probably a reflection of the students' uncertainty about this argument that so many of them fell into long-winded summary and description of the rules of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. Higher-scoring students were able to analyse how this argument functioned and how it supported Bandle's position. The following excerpt analyses how language and argument complement each other to persuade an audience.

Bandle strives to separate the incompetence of those who 'are not' required to do 'training' from those who undertake the difficult process required to obtain a 'Pilot License'. Clearly speaking from experience, the young farmer presents the process of getting a license as difficult which stimulates faith in his fellow farmers that if everyone had to endure a similar challenging test, the skies would be safer. Furthermore, his satirical and scathing description of drones used for recreation as 'toy[s]' seeks to draw parallels between individuals who use drones in this manner with children – both as unskilled and ignorant as the other. By identifying his desire to see stricter regulations surrounding drone use by the 'Civil Aviation Safety Authority', the orator not only reveals that safety permeates his desire for change, but that he is also speaking from a position of authority, in compliance with respected guidelines

Students were very confident in their identification and quotation of appropriate language. They chose appropriate words and phrases, such as 'out of control', 'lethal', 'crashing' and 'damage', instinctively knowing that they were impacting the argument in some way. However, some students were unable to take the analytical step that was required next. Why did the author choose to use these particular words? How did they add weight to the argument? What impact was Bandle seeking to have on his audience by using them? The following excerpt from a high-scoring response demonstrates this analysis.

Bandle bolsters this with the rhetorical questions 'What happens when a drone flies out of range?' or its 'battery runs out?' aiming to instil further alarm in his audience and positioning Byways residents to consider the risks of drone usage by 'inexperienced operators'. This is substantiated by the repetition of the imperative 'imagine', 'imagine the damage', directly imploring the councillors to picture the detriment of recreational drones, which is described by the extensive list of 'searching', 'crashing', 'leaving gates open' and 'letting livestock out', painting an image of chaos and magnifying the amplitude and ubiquity of the consequences of recreational drone usage. The descriptions of 'wayward' drones and 'havoc' further connote tumult, a view supported by the projected photograph, depicting a small-sized drone in the foreground of a field and a wandering operator in the back.

While most students were able to identify tone, for example 'Bandle used a warm, friendly tone' and 'his tone became more emphatic with the word 'Enough!', many students could not go on to explain how the tone

and/or tone change impacted the argument and the audience. Higher-scoring students understood the connection between argument, language and tone; when one changes, the others change as well. Tonal change is always directed at the audience in a particular way. The listing of adjectives to describe tone ranged from the generalised 'moderate' and 'warm' to the more specific 'emphatic' and 'challenging'. Students need regular exposure to different forms of argument and the variations of tone and voice used by writers and speakers. More often than not, simple, accurate descriptors of tone and tone shifts can work very well.

Students were expected to acknowledge and explore the way the slides were used in adding visual weight to Bandle's speech. This is one area in which students are most assured in their analytical skills. There were very few students who did not try to work with the visual material. We are dealing with a visually sophisticated generation of students who analyse graphics in very interesting ways. Students were not expected to write lengthy paragraphs on the slides; in fact, the shorter, sharper reference often works more effectively, and those who can integrate the analysis of the visual into the broader argument show greater mastery of the task, as demonstrated in the following excerpt.

Thus, he leads more logic-inclined farmers through a chain of reasoning; positioning them to equate 'drones' with exorbitant damage to equipment. Accordingly, he coaxingly galvanises these residents to view the recreational use of drones as an impending threat, and thus enthusiastically support its ban. Visually augmenting this is the photograph of a tourist collecting her drone. Literally, the photo visualises the crisis, and resonates with farmers who have observed such behaviours. Yet, on a more figurative level, the ominous silhouette of the woman, combined with the angled shot of the camera, code her as a deceptive and threatening force. Herein, Bandle compels farmers who have suffered from recreational drone usage, to view tourists with a level of distrust and scepticism.

There was a tendency among lower-scoring students to label arguments as logical, factual or creative, a strategy that can lead them into making evaluative judgments about the material that are not relevant to the examination task. In much the same way, they listed language techniques, such as rhetorical questions, inclusive language and anecdotes. Identification and labelling are only the first steps; students should analyse how and why these argument types and language techniques are being used, and what persuasive impact on the audience is intended.

Students should be encouraged to be more specific in their analyses. Many students relied on a general discussion rather than a clear focus on particular arguments that have been presented in deliberately chosen language with the intention of impacting the audience in specific ways.

Like other sections of the paper, there were no expected responses. Assessors were looking for the skills that allow students to demonstrate understanding of how the argument develops and functions, and how language is used to persuade. Students could, and did, achieve full marks by selecting different parts of the material to analyse. There is never an expectation that everything in the article has to be identified and analysed.

Text selection and average scores

The following table shows the Section A texts selected by students in 2020 and the average Section A scores achieved by those students, shown as a percentage of the possible marks. The table also shows the average scores achieved by the same students for Sections B and C, again shown as a percentage of the possible marks for each of those sections.

Section A text	% of students	% Average score – Section A	% Average score – Section B	% Average score – Section C
<i>After Darkness</i>	4.1	53.4	51.4	52.4
<i>All the Light We Cannot See</i>	3	62.3	61.6	59.3
<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i>	0.6	58.2	52.8	51
<i>Extinction</i>	4.8	50.9	53.5	52.7
<i>In Cold Blood</i>	2.9	58	53.1	55.9
<i>Like a House on Fire</i>	4.3	57.7	52.5	53.2
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	5.3	63.9	62.8	61.2
<i>Nine Days</i>	5.1	51.4	50.3	51.2
<i>Old/New World: New & Selected Poems</i>	1.7	54.4	50.7	52.5
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i>	2	60.4	57.9	58.6
<i>Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney</i>	1.8	73.7	71	65.6
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	2.6	66.4	64.7	64.7
<i>Rear Window</i>	25.8	54.4	53.6	55.2
<i>Runaway</i>	0.7	63	61.8	57.9
<i>Station Eleven</i>	9.8	57.5	56	55.5
<i>Stories We Tell</i>	0.6	53.6	47.1	50.3
<i>The Golden Age</i>	6.1	50.1	50.7	51.6
<i>The Lieutenant</i>	5.3	55	54.9	54.2
<i>The Women of Troy</i>	10.8	58.4	57.3	57.3
<i>Things Fall Apart</i>	1.6	60.1	58.2	57
No text	0.9	0	20.1	33.2