

**CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL**

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE  
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

**MAY/JUNE 2007**

**ENGLISH A**

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**ENGLISH A**  
**GENERAL AND BASIC PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS**  
**MAY/JUNE 2007**  
**GENERAL COMMENTS**

General Proficiency

The examination in 2007 was the second year for the revised syllabus. Paper 01, the multiple choice paper, tested most of the Understanding component of the syllabus and Paper 02, the free response paper, tested the Expression component of the syllabus as well as part of the Understanding of summary, literary and persuasive writing. In Paper 02 candidates were allowed a choice in Section 3 between story writing and description. The distribution of marks for the two profiles (Expression and Understanding) across the two papers is as follows:-

	<b>Paper 01 Multiple Choice</b>	<b>Paper 02 Essay</b>	<b>Total</b>
Understanding	60* = 46 +	40* = 30 +	76 + = 40%
Expression	-	90* = 114+	114 + = 60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46 +</b>	<b>144 +</b>	<b>190 + = 100%</b>
* raw score + computed score			

The percentage of candidates attaining Grade III and above this year and previous years is as follows:

2003   2004   2005   2006   2007

49.53   49.60   52.70   50.96   49.01

The performance mean for the examination (out of a total of 125) for 2003-2005 and (out of a total of 190\*) for 2006 and 2007 is as follows:

(2003) 50.62      (2004) 50.74      (2005) 52.76      (2006) 79.14      (2007) 77.94

Average performance over the last five years on the multiple choice paper (Paper 01) out of a total of 60 marks is as follows:

2003   2004   2005      2006   2007  
34.63   33.09   33.67      32.36   30.55

Average performance (2003-2005) in the component sections of Paper 02 (all out of 25 marks) is given below. Average performance in 2006 and 2007 is given out of the relevant totals.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Section 1 Summary skills	8.20	9.23	8.80	10.40 (30)	10.04 (30)
Section 2 Comprehension	8.22	9.30	9.16	12.58 (28)	15.45 (29)
Section 3 Story Writing Description	8.84	8.79	9.70	14.31 (35)	13.62 (35) 10.63 (35)
Section 4 Argument	9.29	8.66	10.54	13.65 (35)	13.74 (35)

### General advice

Teachers need to emphasise that CXC English A (both Basic and General) is an English language examination and that candidates are required, above all, to demonstrate competence in and control of the English language. Preparation for the examination is a gradual process of acquiring and developing skills, both passive (comprehension) and productive (expression), in the English language. In the examination, these skills must be demonstrated in all areas: the proper use of punctuation marks (not only full stops and commas, but also the not so frequently used ones such as colons and semi-colons), as well as other conventions in writing, such as inverted commas, upper case/lower case, abbreviations, the writing of numbers whether in figures or in words, correct spelling, proper sentence structure and paragraphing. **The kind of writing that has become popular in e-mail messages and text messaging is not acceptable in this examination.**

Students should come to the examination with a well rehearsed procedure for tackling each question. In accordance with the concept of writing as a process (abbreviated under examination conditions), candidates should have deeply ingrained in them the procedure of identifying the topic, jotting down points, doing a rough copy and producing a fair copy. This is especially important in writing a summary, in doing a description, in writing a story and in producing a cogent argument. Teachers should advise each student, based on the student's ability and speed, about the best way to move from a rough copy to a fair copy under CXC examination conditions.

Teachers should give students specific instructions about deleting and editing so that the appearance of their work is not off-putting to examiners. Though examiners have to make a great effort to decipher every word that some candidates have written, candidates should never forget that it is their own responsibility to write legibly.

The tasks in the examination are directly related, in most cases, to real-life skills. Employers and indeed the public at large generally regard performance in English language examinations as a measure of one's ability to perform in the world of work. Consequently, it is not advantageous to treat English language as merely an academic subject or as a subject for "nerds".

### Specific advice on the sections of Paper 02

In **Section 1**, when a summary is required, main points must be identified and organised logically within the word limit specified. In cases where the original is reproduced wholesale by the candidate, CXC markers are instructed to interpret this as incompetence. In other words, some attempt must be made by candidates to use their own words. Summarising is a real-life skill (used, for example, by news reporters, policemen and CEOs reporting to their board of directors) and should be treated as such by teachers and candidates.

Some candidates, in attempting to put the summary in their own words, sometimes change meanings or

insert extraneous material. This is penalised. In real life such distortion would be seen either as an attempt to mislead or deceive or, in the case of a policeman presenting evidence to a court, it could lead to wrong,

unfair and disastrous decisions. So, those candidates seeking to achieve full marks or high marks should make sure that they preserve the meaning of the original.

In assessing Question 1, the examiners (keeping in mind the specified word limit) pay specific attention to the candidate's ability to use his/her own language, the accuracy and coverage of the major points and the ability to connect the main points to make the answer read smoothly.

The questions in **Section 2** are set in such a way that precise answers are required. Candidates should be trained to pay close attention to every word that is used and to the different ways in which questions are asked. In response to each question candidates are expected to give precisely what they are asked to give. Answers should be to the point. These questions never require paragraph-long answers. Responding to a question which requires a precise answer by simply lifting a long extract from the passage is a bad strategy, one which usually results in zero being awarded for such an answer. It is the candidates' responsibility to indicate clearly what the answer is; it is not the examiner's responsibility to select it out of a number of possibilities given by the candidate.

This section requires candidates to respond to levels of meaning and to express their answers clearly. It is expected that they have learnt to use their judgment in answering questions. For example, some questions require paraphrases and some ask for evidence. So, candidates should know how to select word or phrases (as required) and use quotation marks to so indicate. Also candidates need to do as the question asks: if it requires 'a word' or 'a phrase', then providing a sentence, for example, is often wrong - it is an indication that the candidates does not know exactly what the answer is.

In the preparation for **Section 3** every candidate should have read the best story from preceding years in order to get a sense of what is required. (These 'Best Stories' are available from CXC.) These stories should not be memorised and reproduced with slight alterations. More generally, candidates should not memorise published stories and hope that this kind of cheating escapes the attention of the examiners.

Although the question paper states word limits as mainly approximations, the experience has been that the better candidates tend to write stories that fall within or not too far outside the word limit. Stories that stretch into four, five, six and more pages tend to be rambling, out of control and weak.

Good stories demonstrate interesting storylines, characterization, good and effective use of details to create atmosphere and mood, good and refreshing language use. Weak stories tend to be linear, mostly behaving like reports, with weak language. Candidates should try to improve their own techniques of story writing, including the effective use of dialogue and the contrast between characters, by studying good stories written by Caribbean authors.

Candidates should use language that they can control. At times candidates use words and structures with which they are not really familiar. The result is that what they write is often verbose, sometimes unintelligible in parts and unimpressive. Teachers are encouraged to help students feel comfortable with the simplicity of language and the use of language that sounds and feels natural. Oral, spontaneous story-telling based, for instance, on photographs, sketches and proverbial statements could stimulate some interesting class productions - for listening, writing and peer interaction.

Since the descriptive essay is a new option in this section, greater attention should be paid to it. Description must be clearly constructed and developed (e.g. the different components must be linked appropriately). Details must be logically and effectively sequenced. The different focuses and facets must be linked appropriately (e.g. background vs. foreground; main focus vs. peripheral detail). The interpretive interventions (reflections) of the writer must be relevant to the purely descriptive elements. Choice of features to be described must be clearly motivated and must effectively contribute to the whole picture. Description, even if imaginative, must be consistent within itself. Any change in perspective (e.g. visual, mood, tone, etc.) must be clearly established. There should be varied and lively use of language to create

picture elements as well as appropriate choice of words to create moods, tones, atmosphere and setting.

In the case of **Section 4**, note that argument skills require both mastery of persuasive language and presentation of sound points, backed up by suitable examples. Providing information without using good argumentative techniques is a weakness; so is the reverse. Candidates should pay attention to 'tone' and 'audience' and not indiscriminately use the language of debating in every argument they present. Candidates can learn different styles of argument by studying letters to the editor and editorials in newspapers as well as short, interesting articles in popular magazines or in the magazine section of newspapers.

Candidates need to read the questions carefully, make sure they understand key words, then select their points, choose examples that support their points and be consistent and clear in their presentation. For some unfounded reason, some candidates operate on the assumption (consciously or unconsciously) that they must agree with the opinion given and that if they do not, they will not receive high marks. The fact is, however, that the questions are deliberately set in such a way as to allow for differences of opinion and most likely if candidates state their real views, they will do better than if they merely agree with what they think is the examiners' view.

## DETAILED COMMENTS

### General Proficiency

#### SECTION ONE (Understanding & Expression)

##### Question 1

In this question candidates were asked to read and then summarise a passage taken from a popular magazine dealing with the history and significance of tattoos and other forms of body markings over the centuries. Candidates were expected to organise the information and present it in continuous prose in no more than 120 words.

The examiners identified the major points in the passage to be the following:-

- Tattoos are permanent markings which have been around from the beginning of civilization.
- They were brought to the Caribbean from Africa, China and India, but the Amerindians wore them even before.
- They were used by people in the Caribbean for religious, ethnic and cultural purposes.
- Over the years they came to be personal expressions identified with rebellion and deviance.
- Attitudes have changed towards tattoos and today they have become acceptable as marks of uniqueness and difference.

Following are three excellent summaries of the passage which give some idea of how candidates may differ but still give the critical information needed:

- (1) *From the beginning of civilization tattoos and other body markings have been marks of identification, spiritual protection and decoration. Tattoos are permanent markings which vary greatly and can be personally very revealing. A tattoo is an instant of your life etched forever on you for the world to see.*

*Tattoos and other body markings were characteristic of the Amerindians of the Caribbean as well as of the Africans, Chinese and Indians who came here. For all these people, they had cultural, spiritual and ethnic significance. Over the centuries, tattoos and other body markings have changed back and forth from group significance to individual significance, presenting a daily image of difference and uniqueness. (112 words)*

- (2) *Tattoos have been around from the beginning of time and were used originally as identification marks, spiritual protection and decoration, but now they are a popular form of self expression. Tattoos are permanent markings on the body which were brought to the Caribbean by slaves from Africa and indentured labourers from China and India, but were also used earlier by Amerindians.*

*Over the years tattoos have changed from being positive to negative, often being confused with rebellion and deviance (non-conformity). Today, tattoos are once again seen as something positive: they are worn by people from all walks of life, on all parts of their body, saying to the world it's all right to be different. (115 words)*

- (3) *Tattoos have been around from the earliest of times for identification as well as for spiritual and decorative purposes. They are more unique and permanent than other symbols and ornaments and can be seen by everyone.*

*Tattoos and other body markings came to the Caribbean from Africa, China and India with slaves and indentured workers. Indigenous people also used tattoos for spiritual, cultural and personal reasons and to indicate social status.*

*Over time, tattoos displayed more personal expressions and were perceived by some to display anti-social or deviant behaviour. Today, however, tattoos have re-emerged as signs of personal expression, have gained respectability and are linked with cultural and social identity and individuality and not merely with style. (116 words)*

Performance on Question 1 this year was about the same as last year, revealing the same strengths and weaknesses in candidates' answers. There were too many candidates who did not observe the word limit given. Among these, some seemed to operate with the casual assumption that excess would be overlooked in all answers, while a few attempted to deceive the examiners by putting an incorrect number of words at the end of their answer.

As usual, many candidates lifted portions of the passage, of varying lengths, verbatim or paraphrased them indiscriminately. Candidates who approached summary writing as a deletion exercise often ended up having sentences or pieces of sentences which were improperly connected to what preceded, were inaccurate or incoherent. This was especially so in relation to paragraph three, which dealt with the different ethnic groups.

Superior scripts clearly demonstrated satisfactory comprehension and writing skills, without any injection of extraneous material. They were able to bring different sentences and paragraphs together by the use of appropriate connectives and to cover all the main points.

### **Suggestions for teachers and students**

In preparing students for this section of the paper, teachers should:

- (i) remind students to observe the stated length.
- (ii) drill students in the skill of reading questions for theme and specific tasks to be done; insist that students read the instruction given and not assume that every year it is identical.
- (iii) help students to recognize the fact that summary writing comprises reading and writing skills (comprehension and composition skills)
- (iv) help students to appreciate some of the basic features of summary writing:-
  - a) using one's own words as far as possible
  - b) using straightforward English with clarity and conciseness
  - c) responding to the rubric of the question with its implications for audience, purpose and situation/context
  - d) using connectives to achieve fluency of writing/reading
  - e) observing correct mechanics of the language

## SECTION TWO (Understanding)

Performance in this section improved over last year with many candidates getting full or nearly full marks. There were no specific questions that candidates found particularly difficult, except for 2 (f). There were still a number of candidates who found it difficult to answer the question and stop, but felt the need to go on to write paragraph-long answers.

### Question 2

This question sought in part to test candidates' understanding of a passage taken from Noel Woodroffe's *Wing's Way*. The following were deemed to be the correct answers to the questions set:

- (a) *Dawn; Midday; Evening*
- (b) *fish/ nets; cooking; oil*
- (c) *the flares of the oil refinery*  
*a huge red ball (1 mark)*
- (d) (the kind of death) *found in the eyes of broken, old men*  
*(the kind of death) found on abandoned coasts ...*  
*the hopelessness of this backwater village*
- (e) *climbed*
- (f) An answer which suggested struggle and difficulty
- (g) The weight of the cars on the sun-softened pitch
- (h) *backwater village; missed and ignored; hopelessness of this backwater; swept clean of talent and vitality; dependent upon a stony earth and dwindling oil; vision of a hopeless future.*

Since 2 (f) required candidates to go beyond quoting from the passage and to construct the answer based on an understanding of the passage, this question was generally not well done. In many cases, it was clear that candidates were unable to follow the thread of meaning (as in the second paragraph of the passage) when sentences were beyond a certain length.

### Question 3

This question sought in part to test candidates' understanding of a view put forward about the 'generation gap' in an article extracted from *Time* magazine. The following were deemed to be the correct answers:

- (a) a large amount
- (b) the child has adult concerns; the child wants a lot of privacy; the child no longer trusts the goodwill of parents
- (c) not fixed; not forever; can be reversed; variable
- (d) the child's brain has matured; the child is capable of more independent judgement
- (e) parents
- (f) (i) their powerful feelings/their social lives/social power  
(ii) power/opinion of other boys/anxiety about masculinity



- (g) they still need their mothers; even though bigger than her, they have to obey her
- (h) *but*

In response to a question as uncomplicated as 3 (a) for which candidates had to construct an answer using their own words, what several candidates wrote was either vague, misleading or inaccurate. This was also the case with answers to 3 (c).

### **Suggestions for teachers and students**

Teachers still have to do more work in order to get students to move beyond the literal, to make logical judgements and to express these accurately.

Teachers should dissuade students from giving long-winded answers which rarely conceal ignorance.

Teachers should bear in mind that, in any one year, more questions like 2 (f) may occur on the examination paper and fewer which require direct citation from the passage. The incidence of particular question types will vary according to the selections the examiners make to ensure that the full syllabus is covered. Teachers should therefore familiarise themselves with this section of the syllabus or peruse papers over the years to make sure that they provide practice for students in all the question types specified in the syllabus.

### **SECTION THREE (Expression)**

#### Questions 4, 5 and 6

Question 4 required that candidates write a story based on a picture in which a man showed some measure of distress. Question 5 asked candidates to write a story which included the dramatic line *The phone rang once and stopped. It rang again. This was it now*. Question 6 required that candidates write a descriptive essay asking candidates to describe what some astronauts saw as they landed.

Question 6 was the least popular of the questions in this section (attempted by 10% of the candidates) and also the one least well done on average. Question 5 was the most popular (attempted by 52%) with Question 4 in between (attempted by 34%). Question 5 produced the best story for 2007. The overall performance on this section was not as good as last year.

Question 4 produced many responses dealing with the Iraq war or with disasters of Muslims/Arabs in various parts of the world. Most candidates were able to integrate the picture quite well into the story and many candidates were able to produce interesting stories.

Question 5 produced a variety of stories, some very well done and others which paid little attention to the significance of *This was it now* in the rubric. Even though most responses did not capture the idea of a pre-arranged signal, there was some element of panic or dreaming that allowed for a reasonable interpretation of the stimulus. As usual, many responses to this question had the stimulus quotation inserted without satisfactory integration into the plot.

In the case of Question 6, a great number of candidates, as was the case last year, wrote responses without reading the instructions carefully. Some of the responses suggest that candidates were unfamiliar with description and had had no practice dealing with it. In the relevant responses to this question, some candidates wrote about what the astronauts saw while landing on another planet, while others wrote on what they saw on returning to Earth. Weaker candidates found difficulty limiting themselves to describing what the astronauts saw as they landed and included in their responses a narration of the previous and subsequent travels of the astronauts.

### **Suggestions for teachers and students**

**Teachers should treat Section Three as having two sections - two questions requiring short stories and one question requiring a descriptive essay.**

Teachers should continue to use pictures from varied sources, especially those dealing with current topics and themes in newspapers, to help stimulate and guide writing. This helps to make classroom writing interesting and should help students to focus on the use of details to create character, emotion and atmosphere. The creation of humour in writing is something that students might enjoy doing in their writing classes - how to tell a joke, how to write a joke, how to hold back the punch line are part of story-writing that might interest even reluctant writers. How to use language effectively to do all this, for example, use of short sentences and exclamation marks for effect could be a natural way of calling attention to form.

In relation to integrating the given quotation into the story, teachers are advised to work more on logical development of plot, integration of story elements, along with the other story writing elements. Candidates whose stories are impressive are those who use relevant details to create atmosphere, mood and feelings. Training in short story writing must always stress the process of thinking, drafting, editing and proof reading.

Students should be explicitly made familiar with the difference between narrative and descriptive writing. Students should imagine themselves using a camera and describing what they see through the lens as they move the camera gradually from left to right to take in the whole scene. While it is necessary for teachers to get students accustomed to description by practising descriptive phrases and sentences with striking adjectives and adverbs, students should be wary about memorising flowery phrases and sticking them willy-nilly into descriptive essays. In order to prepare students for this question, teachers have to focus specifically on vocabulary enrichment by providing students with a list of adjectives, one of nouns and another of adverbs and get students to combine them in a relevant way as they describe specific scenes. Teachers need to make these lists cover all the senses - sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste.

### **SECTION FOUR (Expression)**

#### Questions 7 and 8

Question 7 asked candidates to present an argument for or against the use of cellular phones in school. Question 8 asked candidates to express their views on the topic *Popular music and dance on display in the Caribbean today are corrupting the youth and making them irresponsible*. Both these questions were within the immediate interest and current knowledge of candidates and candidates did not demonstrate any significant difference in preference for the one or the other. Even so, performance in this section this year was not significantly higher than last year.

Question 7 seemed to have been predicted and was practised in many schools throughout the region. This resulted in well-rehearsed answers in terms of points given for or against the proposition. The better responses to this question displayed good argumentative techniques/rhetorical devices. In addition, they anticipated the arguments on the other side and countered them satisfactorily.

Responses to Question 8 too often failed to examine and demonstrate the cause/effect relationship between music/dance and corrupt, indisciplined youth. They merely asserted that music and dance are a corrupting force and that the youth of today are corrupt.

### **Suggestions for teachers and students**

While it is necessary to keep abreast of topics of local interest, students also need to read and discuss in class wider or international topics because it is not always that topics close to their immediate and current experience will be given in this section.

Students need constant practice in logical development of argument, especially in the proper use of conjunctions and adverbs which express logical relations, as in cause and effect, contrast and concession. Words and phrases such as ‘however’, ‘although’, ‘consequently’, ‘by contrast’, ‘accordingly’ should be mastered and used in full sentences rather than meaninglessly or in fragments, as they often are.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

### Basic Proficiency

The examination in 2007 was the second year for the revised syllabus. However, this examination is due to be discontinued after next year. Paper 01, the multiple choice paper, tested most of the Understanding component of the syllabus and Paper 02, the free response paper, tested the Expression component of the syllabus as well as part of the Understanding of summary, literary and persuasive writing. The distribution of marks for the two profiles (Expression and Understanding) across the two papers is as follows:-

	<b>Paper 01 Multiple Choice</b>	<b>Paper 02 Essay</b>	<b>Total</b>
Understanding	60	37	97 = 60%
Expression	-	65	65 = 40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	102	<b>162 = 100%</b>

The number of candidates taking the examination in 2007 declined significantly when compared with previous years:

3,473 (2005) → 3,504 (2006) → 2755 (2007).

There was a decrease in the percentage of candidates attaining Grade III and above in 2007:

29.42% (2005) → 26.51% (2006) → 25.01% (2007).

The performance mean in 2007 was lower than in 2005 and 2006:

(2005) 52.28 (=37%) → (2006) 60.14 (= 37%) → (2007) 57.65 (=36%).

## DETAILED COMMENTS

### Paper 01 - Multiple Choice

Candidates’ performance in Paper 01 in 2007 showed a decline when compared with 2005 and 2006. The mean score in 2005, out of a possible 60, was 27.84; this moved to 28.14 in 2006 and 27.43 in 2007.

### Paper 02 - Free Response

Average performance in the component sections of Paper 02 was as follows (The numbers in brackets are the maximum totals for the respective questions):

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Section 1 Summary skills	5.06 (20)	5.56 (20)	7.17 (30)	7.35 (30)
Section 2 Comprehension	9.87 (24)	9.93 (24)	12.36 (27)	12.93 (27)
Section 3 Story Writing/ Description	5.17 (16)	5.14 (16)	6.65 (20)	6.29 (20)/5.20 (20)
Section 4 Argument	5.62 (20)	6.9 (20)	8.62 (25)	6.41 (25)

### SECTION ONE (Understanding & Expression)

The passage to be summarized, adapted from Lester Brown's *The interdependence of nations*, dealt with the unemployment crisis in Third World Countries. It appeared to be not only unfamiliar reading material for many candidates but also beyond their grasp. For example, many candidates seemed unable to fully understand the meaning of expressions such as *to bring under the plough, unique situation in historical terms, profound implications, political and economic well-being of countries.*

The candidates who demonstrated competence or superiority were able to summarize the passage in 80 words, as required, without losing either the focus or the content of the original passage. The weaker candidates simply lifted sections from the original passage to form a summary. As regards economy of expression, in several of the incompetent responses, the original passage was reproduced in a telegraphic style through omission of function words and transitional words and phrases, thus producing a string of disjointed sentences. Weaker responses also showed evidence of a lack of fundamental skills in summary writing. For instance, the listing of countries was quite notably preserved: "*... the densely populated countries of Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Central America and the Andean Region.*"

#### Advice to teachers

Students need to be exposed to a variety of reading material including basic magazines produced by international organisations on the health and economic conditions of people across the world. Students would thus expand and enrich their vocabulary by regular reading of relevant literature. This could be done within a classroom book club.

In order to help students express themselves logically, precisely and concisely, teachers should provide students with ample exercises in making construction shifts and writing/recognizing equivalent sentences. Routine oral practice in the use of transitional words and phrases would also be useful.

### SECTION TWO (Understanding)

The general performance on this section was commendable to some extent. The fact that students could easily relate to the content of both passages resulted in a few of them integrating the content into their short stories.

Question 2 sought in part to test candidates' understanding of a passage taken from Juliana Magloire's *The Sea Hawk*.

Overall, those questions which posed the greatest difficulty were 2 (c) and 2 (g), with 2 (e) proving to be the easiest. The stronger candidates had no problem with the questions and offered appropriate and correct responses to the majority of them. The weaker candidates had difficulty in interpreting the passage and the evidence of this was given in the nature of their responses. For example, in response to 2 (a) (*What did Bo do for a living?*) candidates gave responses such 'doctor', 'smuggler', 'engineer', 'lifeguard' as well as other incorrect answers.

Question 3 sought in part to test candidates' understanding of a passage on beauty and the beauty industry taken from a newspaper magazine.

The last three questions (e-g) were better handled than the first four. Weaker candidates were unable to interpret expressions such as *going under the knife* and *beauty can no longer be considered skin deep* in 3 (a) and 3 (b) respectively. Many of the weaker candidates quoted large portions of the passage with the hope that these would provide the correct answer.

### **Advice to teachers**

Students need more practice in answering the kinds of questions set on the paper, questions requiring precise answers. In preparing for these questions teachers should make sure that students read the questions a number of times before they attempt to write their answers. After reading the whole passage, students should also re-read the section of the passage relevant to each specific question to make sure that what they are thinking of writing is what the passage says. Students should be advised to re-read what they have written to make sure that it makes sense to someone reading it. A specific area that needs greater focus is getting students to recognise inference.

### **SECTION THREE (Expression)**

Question 4 required candidates to write a story based on a picture featuring an old man sitting playing a guitar. Question 5 asked candidates to write a story which ended with the words *I should have known better than to rely on someone like that*. Question 6 required candidates to describe the experience of someone named Chris who was seeing the city for the first time at Christmas.

The most popular of these questions was Question 4. The least popular was Question 5 and the weakest and most inappropriate responses came from those who attempted Question 6.

In relation to Question 4 and Question 5, the stronger candidates were able to use lively vocabulary and imaginative settings to give better than a pedestrian recounting of incidents. They were able to develop a plot adequately, set up interesting conflict situations and have a satisfactory resolution. They made use of well-selected details, had good characterization and effective use of dialogue. Their stories were credible.

The weaker candidates demonstrated various degrees of inability to use the elements of short story writing. They were unable to organize events and had great difficulty in using language effectively and managing the mechanics of grammar. There was usually a tenuous link between stimulus and story; the ending was most often forced, with the result that the whole strained one's credibility.

In relation to Question 6, most candidates wrote responses with long introductions and focussed very little on the description of Chris' experience.

### **Advice to teachers**

Some of the weaknesses in this section that need special attention are:

- Grammatical problems (tense, use of pronouns, sentence structure)
- Mere recounting of events with little or no attempt to make the story come alive through development of plot, characterization, appeal to the senses, effective selection of details.
- Poor paragraphing and ineffective use of dialogue.

It is recommended therefore that teachers employ all available resources to:

- teach the elements of story writing systematically;
- provide students with models of good short stories;
- analyse good short stories as a classroom activity;
- clarify for students on an ongoing basis the difference between report writing and story writing;

- provide students with copious practice in writing stories;
- stimulate a desire among students to read;
- not to give up on the teaching of the mechanics of writing;
- monitor more carefully bad handwriting and careless errors such as the pervasive ‘the’ for ‘they’.

#### **SECTION FOUR (Expression)**

This section tested the candidates’ ability to express their views persuasively using various techniques of argument. Question 7 required students to state their views on the topic *Too much feteing and partying in the Caribbean today is encouraging idleness and indiscipline*. Question 8 required candidates to write an argument either supporting or opposing the statement *As soon as children reach the age of 18, they should leave home, find a job and live independently*.

Question 8 was the preferred one of the two. Although most students who attempted the question clearly had views on it, some had difficulty in effectively developing points to support their arguments. There was, however, evidence of attempts to expand, show cause and effect and employ persuasive techniques in the presentation of the essay.

The better candidates selected relevant information and developed points clearly in support of the position taken. There were instances of logical development and appropriate reinforcement of the argument. Some candidates were able to clinch their arguments with an effective conclusion.

There was a general weakness in expression and mechanics of writing. In weaker scripts there was a mere listing of points, under-developed thoughts and limited views. There was also evidence of misuse of prepositions, awkward syntax, sentence fragments, run-on sentences and neglect of appropriate punctuation, especially question marks.

#### **Advice to teachers**

Classroom teachers need to emphasize language expression, especially sentence structure, appropriate vocabulary, mechanics and organisation of argument. There is also need for more concerted teaching of literary devices and techniques of persuasion. This will greatly assist in the coherence of responses, sequencing and logical development of argument. In addition, interpretative and organisational skills need to be mastered by students. For this to be possible, classroom teachers, especially those whose major was English literature rather than language, first need to be actively aware of these skills, master them and use effective strategies to get students to acquire the same.

Teachers are encouraged to continue to provide classroom activities for students to practise persuasive skills orally. They should encourage students to ‘translate’ popular slang expressions and should use ‘teachable moments’ to underscore the concept of appropriate use of language. Interesting newspaper editorials could be used for class discussions. This would also help to develop students’ analytical thinking and ability to respond concisely to higher order questions posed in Section 2. Students need more practice in logical development of argument, use of rhetorical questions and appropriate use of figurative language. Students need to be given many opportunities to write. Students need more practice in the use of topic sentences and paragraphs. Students would benefit from timed practice exercises in preparation for the examination.

Too few students are demonstrating competence in Profile 2 (Expression) simply because they are having problems with the mechanics of writing. Students seem oblivious of spelling rules and the need to spell correctly. For example, in Section 3 which provided a picture stimulus of an old man playing a guitar, there were at least a dozen different spellings of the word ‘guitar’. One noticeable element this year was that many students demonstrated competence in the use of quotation marks. Apart from this, punctuation was limited to full stops and commas. Paragraphing was ignored this year so often, as it has been in previous years, that one begins to wonder whether students ever get enough practice in this aspect of writing. There is therefore a constant need to monitor and address these elements of writing.