

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for the portfolio-writing component.

Candidate 1

Genre

Reflective writing – A reflection of my 12-year-old feminist self

Content

The candidate opens their essay by making a direct and conscious reference to the clichéd opening of the essay on ‘feminism’ written when they were 12 years old. They then explain that this current essay will be a ‘more accurate and up to date opinion on feminism’. The candidate then explains that the focus now is not feminism per se, but ‘equality’.

The second paragraph moves on to look at the idea that ‘feminism is different for everyone’ and that the candidate’s assertion is now that ‘culture approaches feminism the wrong way’. In the third paragraph, the candidate comments upon the idea that “feminazis” are a major problem in the current debate and likens them to “anti-vaxxers” in that their views are based upon ‘incorrect and misunderstood information’, and these attitudes may well make some resistant to engaging with some ideas of feminism. They then finish off the paragraph by commenting on ‘meme culture’ and how this has contributed to bringing ‘new heat to the debate’.

The candidate moves into a more positive vein in the fourth paragraph as they discuss the positive female role models which are ‘inspiring a generation of young women to become engaged in politics’. Yet in the penultimate paragraph, the candidate goes on to outline the ‘one thing I do dislike about being a female in 2019’ and that is the imbalance in the delivery of messages about responsibilities and dangers to young men and young women.

The candidate completes their essay with a final paragraph of reflection which again reiterates the candidate’s perception of the world shifting from one of fear and anger when she was 12 years old, to one which is not as frightening, but one which is now focussed upon a wider sense of equality of not only genders, but also of ‘races, religions, and cultures.’ The candidate’s **treatment of central ideas/feelings reveals some thoughtfulness** throughout, and this places this aspect of the essay firmly within the 9-7 band range.

Structure

The candidate uses a standard structure for reflective writing in that the idea is established in the introduction, developed to some extent through the next four paragraphs, and rounded off in the conclusion.

The candidate – as is appropriate – also brings some balance to the essay in that they periodically look to the naïve attitudes of the 12-year-old author and contrast them sharply with the present-day attitudes. This creates some impact. Also, the candidate firmly locates the essay in the personal reflective mode in the majority of the main body paragraphs with phrases such as: ‘I think feminism ...’, ‘As a young woman in society, I think’ and ‘One thing I do dislike ...’ as the openings to three of the four topic sentences, and there is a neatness, of sorts, in the idea of equality which is raised in the introduction: ‘who wouldn’t want to be considered equal among society?’ and returned to in the conclusion: ‘The real issue is to focus on equality’. Therefore, the **shaping and sequencing** could be said to have **some impact** and is placed within the 9-7 band range.

Tone/mood

The essay’s mood is one of honest reflection on how the candidate saw their 12-year-old self and their writing: ‘The essay [...] was a horrific mismatched, misinformed, mistake of writing’; ‘I now know my beliefs were wrong’; ‘[...] here I am now, a modern young woman, living in 2019, worlds apart from the way I was in 2014.’

The candidate then genuinely attempts to be reflective with: ‘I know that in the past I have behaved in this manner, but I know that I’ve learned from my mistakes’ and moves into creating a very positive outlook in that she states she is ‘so proud that society in general is more encouraging to girls and women’ and that ‘it’s phenomenal that young girls receive the amount of support that they do’ and that ‘it is an extremely positive way of educating a young generation and makes me so proud to be a young woman.’

The final paragraph opens with the obvious and identifiable ‘To reflect back on’ to instigate the candidate’s acknowledgement that her ‘ideas and opinions [...] develop and change as I grow older.’ The **essay employs a tone/mood which is discernible at various points revealing an identifiable and appropriate authorial voice** and is placed solidly within the 9-7 band range.

Expression

The candidate employs a range of techniques to support their ideas and feelings throughout the essay. For example, the rhetorical question in the first paragraph which asks: ‘who wouldn’t want to be considered equal amongst society?’ along with the alliterative emphasis of ‘mismatched, misinformed mistake’; the use of the parenthetical ‘(even if it’s only somewhat for the public eye)’ and repetition of ‘for different reasons’ in paragraph 2; the use of the inverted commas in the third paragraph to suggest authorial detachment in ‘these new “feminists”’ and use of the neologistic “feminazis” and “anti-vaxxers”’; the use of the list in the fourth paragraph to highlight the achievements of Serena Williams, ‘Number one tennis player, strong mother and feminist icon’; in the fifth paragraph, the use of the ‘Yes [...] but’ grammatical construction to acknowledge yet rebut the point, alongside a further use of parenthesis; and the final paragraph’s climactic sentence which supports a renewed focus from the candidate in their approach towards equality for all as opposed to the introspective fears of their 12-year-old self: ‘There’s always someone worse off than you, so focussing on others instead of yourself is always a good start.’ This use of language/technique can be said to support the

fact that the candidate employs **a consistently accurate use of style, technique and language with some originality** in order to support the ideas and feelings being promoted throughout, and again places this aspect of the piece into the 9-7 band range.

The candidate was awarded **9 marks**. This piece of writing fully and consistently meets the descriptors of the 9-7 band range and is therefore awarded the highest mark in the range.

Candidate 2

Genre

Reflective writing – The Ruby Jubilee

Content

This piece begins with the writer recollecting photographs of their grandparents on their wedding day. The marriage was an ‘arranged marriage’ and the figures in the photographs are described as ‘rigid’ and their pose ‘as ordered by the photographer’, both emphasising a stilted and awkward beginning in the marriage of the writer’s grandparents. The candidate then reflects on this type of beginning and questions the effect this may have on their own future.

The writer then looks at 10 years of marriage, and the tin anniversary: they make an astute observation that their grandparents ‘once too, were in love – albeit not with each other.’ The writer goes on to ponder upon two other photographs which highlight the fact that their grandparents had others in their lives at some time in their pasts. Their grandmother’s photograph is of her dancing the ‘polka with a man in a shabby looking suit’ and on being ‘lightly’ teased by the writer’s mother and aunt, bringing on a ‘childish glint like a 14 year old girl with a high school crush’ yet their grandmother says nothing – ‘she laughs, and that’s that.’ The second photograph is of an unknown woman with a dedication to the writer’s grandfather in the form of a ‘silly two sentence poem of love – and “forever your sweetheart, Helena”’. The writer comments that the photograph was ‘not hidden in my granddad’s wallet nor journal, it just exists’, and – again – is perceptive in seeing that their grandmother ‘had to accept that she was never the one. Just like my granddad had to accept the same thing.’ The writer moves on to reflect on these discoveries by asking: ‘are we always searching for that one right person, or is everyone at one point the right person to us?’ and they also consider the traditional nature of their grandparents’ marriage in a ‘heavily Catholic Poland’ alongside the fact that the tradition of getting ‘rid of your old lover when you find a new one [...] didn’t seem to be heavily present in their household.’

The candidate moves on to the ‘20 years: CHINA’ section and a more discordant and abstract view of love and marriage. The idea of the fragility of love, and how it is repaired in the knowledge that it will ‘shatter again sooner or later’ is central to this section, as are those affected by the stresses on a marriage: ‘Two children, in whom every crash is engrained’; ‘the predator and prey’; ‘the families behind it’; ‘the church behind it’ and ‘the neighbours with glazed over eyes’.

The fourth section of this piece moves to ‘30 years: PEARLS’, and it shifts from photographs to the reality of the writer and their sister being born and becoming a part of the family and the memories explored. These memories are of violence and discord where the writer’s grandfather is concerned with ‘the stench of alcohol’, ‘doors slamming shut and loud arguments’ which had eventually ‘dissipated, both from his hands and seemingly from the mind of my grandma.’ The writer moves on to look at the comparisons between pearls and their grandparents’ marriage in that pearls are all about ‘hidden beauty inside, matured over time, sheltered by a shell of a dull oyster’ and the world around them and its hardships creating layers ‘over their two figures.’

The reflective piece moves to a conclusion with the final section on '40 years: RUBY', with the grandparents playing cards in a rather docile manner. The writer engages with the idea of the ruby and its connotations not of 'passion and love' but of 'blood', 'chaos', and violence and aggression. The writer finishes by acknowledging that life now for their grandmother in particular is 'the calm after the storm' and that their grandmother's 'attitude to the whole ordeal always made me sad inside', yet they do make the final observation on the value of 'complaining about a storm after it's passed'. Taking all of this into consideration, the writer's treatment of **experiences reveals sustained thoughtfulness/insight throughout** the piece.

Structure

The writer, to some degree, **shapes and sequences the piece in a skilful manner which contributes significantly to the impact** of the writing. They use traditional wedding anniversary gifts – Tin, China, Pearls and Ruby – to punctuate their grandparents' relationship and their own thoughts on them and their views of love and relationships. The writer also weaves qualities of each of these materials into the fabric of each section. With '10 years: TIN', the section links back to the end of the previous 'Wedding Day' section where the staged photograph of their grandparents has them described as being 'like two little tin men sitting'. The candidate moves on to china and the extended metaphor which suggests that the 'ideals behind a marriage [...] shatter like fine china' and that everything is 'fragile' but 'persistent hands' keep moving the pieces 'picking them up and gluing them back together into a bowl they know will shatter again sooner or later.' The writer goes on to look at the symbolic resonance of the pearls and the dichotomy of the beautiful pearl surrounded by 'the dull oyster' and then finally the associations around the ruby which, like the pearl, has contrasting associations which are explored.

Tone/mood

The **mood is skilfully created** at various points in the piece and **generally sustained revealing a clearly distinctive authorial voice**. The writer, early in the piece, offers a sense of their general concern about their own future built around their own observations of their grandparents' marriage – for example, on the first page, the writer asks the question: 'Marriage based upon efficiency of and comfort of two families has slowly faded out of tradition and norm – does that mean that I will be happier?' It also becomes clear as the piece progresses that the writer is critical of their grandfather, 'a more reserved person' who is associated with 'the stench of alcohol' and 'violence' which 'had dissipated', and yet somewhat sympathetic to the grandmother when the writer observes that 'Forty years stretches out like a treacherously long road in my grandma's eyes as she mentions it in passing.'

Expression

The candidate, for much of the piece, employs a **skilful use of style, technique and language, and a high degree of originality**. On top of the structural aspects of the piece, the writer uses a range of techniques to highlight many aspects of love and marriage which they explore. For example, the use of simile on the first page with their grandparents being compared to 'tin soldiers'; a range of questions – some rhetorical, through the entire piece which emphasises the

writer's own reflection on these mature issues; the extended metaphor of the china on the second page; the symbolism of the pearls on the second and third pages; simile of 'dripped like melted wax' at the top of the third page; sound and personification in the first paragraph of the 40 years: RUBY section; along with repetition, italicisation and minor sentences throughout.

The candidate was awarded **13 marks**. This piece just meets the descriptors of the 15-13 band range and is therefore awarded the lowest mark in the range.

Candidate 3

Genre

Reflective writing – Old Saint Paul's

Content

This piece clearly **demonstrates treatment of ideas/feelings and experiences which reveals thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout**. The writer presents the reader with a warm and affectionate portrait of life as a choral scholar at Old Saint Paul's in Edinburgh which incorporates two strands of reflection: what Old Saint Paul's means to them and on the passing of time itself.

The opening description 'Nestled, cave like' introduces the idea of the building as a 'rock of stability and calm'. The writer paints an evocative picture of their introduction to the church with the 'incense hugged me' and its 'time worn wood' and then reflects on 'the purpose of Evensong' as 'our music lulls the fiery sun to rest'. The improvisations of John, the organist, are described with some nicely understated wit and style: 'This organ stop ...is his current excuse for escapist romanticism and is increasingly evident in his playing.' The writer describes 'the invisible art' created by the choir and its positive effect as it 'washes over everything, embracing all, sweeping back their cares'. Towards the foot of the first page the writer considers the value and power of silence, 'a blessed calm, broken only by the whispers of a friend' and celebrates the shared feeling of 'Unanimity, purpose ...as our feet hit the ground as one'.

The description of the writer's friendship with Carolyn and her 'jewel like flat' is also **thoughtful and insightful**. The anecdote of the first visit to Carolyn's flat allows further references to music ("Hmm, interesting interpretation") and the passing of time ('one of the last of her kind').

The writer returns to 'John, our soft-eyed Director and organist' in the middle of the second page and their admiration for this man and a life marked out in 'thirty Lents, thirty Ascensions and Assumptions, thirty Advents and Christmases'. A very human picture of the man emerges from the writing – 'Stubborn, but humble and jovial', '...serving too much red wine between the Easter services. This is his life. The drum of our footsteps, his pulse.'

The piece concludes with more explicit reflection on the nature of time ('All things must pass') and links the church, John and Carolyn together again as she 'comes to every Evensong to watch the thurible swinging like a pendulum.' The concluding sentences provide a neatly constructed coda to the piece.

Structure

The writer has employed **consistent shaping and sequencing which contributes to impact**. There is an internal consistency in the many repeated motifs and references as the writer introduces an idea or image and then returns to it later in the piece. For example, the maternal, protective character of the church is suggested in 'sway the cradle' in the opening paragraph and how the smoke 'enclosed me like a womb' three paragraphs later. The vivid image of the 'almost tribal' choristers walking 'up the aisle singing ...' at the foot of the first page is echoed in 'The drum of our footsteps' towards the end of the second page. The description of the church as 'our shelter from the storm' at the very

end recalls the inability of 'the fierce east wind' to 'trouble our reverie' from the beginning. References to the seasons of the year ('It was October. Apple time'; 'blossom time') and the ecclesiastical calendar punctuate the piece and lend a sense of the regularity and inevitability of the passing of time. The anecdote of the first visit to Carolyn's flat fits seamlessly into the piece as a whole.

Tone/mood

Tone and mood have been **skilfully created and rigorously sustained**. A **clearly distinctive and committed authorial voice** is apparent in this very engaging piece of writing. The occasional description that might be considered mawkish or sentimental ('They cheered the room like little perching robins') is more than compensated for by the self-awareness displayed by the writer elsewhere in the piece ('the choir stalls, perfectly placed for covert humour'; 'As I troubled the decrepit piano for a tune'). The writer reflects upon serious ideas but does so with a lightness of touch that is very engaging. A line such as 'the organist's unique and inventive improvisation' is typical of the sense of irony often underlying the work.

Expression

This piece of writing clearly **demonstrates a skilful use of style, technique and language, and a high degree of originality**. The vocabulary of Episcopalian worship incorporated into the piece enhances the overall achievement.

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**. The piece can be placed in the 15-13 mark range. It fully meets the standard described and so it is awarded the highest mark in the range.