

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 12

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for this piece of the Portfolio writing.

The candidate was awarded **6 marks**.

Genre: Creative - reflective

Title: Fifteen, five, twenty, and ten ... Can I return?

This piece opens with the candidate describing a bathroom and explaining that they had been in it once, but would not do so again as it reminded them of the “events that had occurred”.

The candidate then goes on to establish the time she was at a friend’s with a group of friends watching movies and eating popcorn when she suffered an anxiety attack which resulted in her hiding out in said upstairs bathroom for an hour.

The third paragraph outlines what she did in that hour (despite the fact that she only explicitly accounts for 50 minutes) – crying, thinking, lying on the floor, preparing to return to her friends. She returns to her five friends, but the anxiety kicks in again as she enters the room and her friends look at her, and once again she returns to the bathroom.

The candidate then looks back at her high school life and explains that “feelings of panic” have affected them “every day” of that time. The candidate goes on to explain that the simplest of things became an issue, and that a major problem was that her anxiety and panic were not visible, and that everyone around her would be unaware of the impending panic. This leads to the candidate’s doubts about how each day will pan out, how they will be able to cope with the “mundane tasks” of “school life”, and when these feelings were going to end.

The candidate goes on to juxtapose the calm ease of her friends with her anticipation of inner feelings of panic and anxiety, where irrational thoughts enter her mind as she fears the “world would crumble” and she would be “left standing alone, humiliated”. The candidate is further troubled by the lack of understanding about what triggers the attacks, how long the attacks will last, and where these panic attacks take place. But they do acknowledge that “being put in a situation which is uncomfortable” will always be a trigger and that “speaking to new people, speaking in class, giving a presentation” will trigger these attacks. They go on to outline other triggers to their attacks such as “speaking to a new teacher on my own, seeing a new person, being left alone to deal with vast numbers of people, [...] work[ing] one to one with a teacher”, and they highlight their frustrations at being unable to pin down what the problems are which trigger

these attacks. The candidate, once again, returns to the feelings of panic and their impulse to run and hide from the world.

The candidate shifts tone completely as they explain how they gain relief from the world of anxiety which surrounds them: they play the piano. The act of playing the piano dispels the “need to run” and the candidate can “finish the day”. The candidate finishes off by adding that “standing alone in the middle of a field, looking out across the landscape [...] root[s] me back to earth”, and “being at peace in the countryside [...] is where I am safe.”

Content

The candidate's feelings are dealt with in a limited way from the beginning of the essay and do not really go beyond a dry accounting of “every time after that I would refuse to go in”; “The first time it happened I was caught unaware.” and “each day I struggle to break out.” It is not until the paragraphs 11-13 that the candidate explores their experiences and feelings in a more thoughtful way as they deal with how playing the piano assists them in bringing some relief to their panic: the room with the piano creates “a sense of warmth, of safety preventing the danger circulating through me”; “The large room is the space I need, stopping the sense of entrapment, the sense of confinement”; “As the notes pour out filling the room the feelings of panic, the inability to cope disappears”; and finally, they state “I can return. I can go back. I can finish the day.” Paragraphs 12 and 13 are attempts to be more insightful but there are issues with the control of expression which mean that the paragraphs are limited in their impact. On the whole, albeit the ‘piano’ paragraph makes attempts to offer insight, the insight and thoughtfulness of the entire piece is considered, holistically, to be limited at this level and therefore falls within the 6-4 band range.

Structure

The structural shaping and sequencing of this reflective essay is standard for the genre in terms of reflection: “I remember”; “The first time it happened”; “The first time was four years ago”; and the candidate has a simple logical approach to the topic in that they remember the first time they had a panic attack, move on to its all-encompassing nature throughout their school life, and finishing with their means of relief from panic. The candidate does explain the title and link to it, and this look at timings is returned to in a different fashion later in the piece, but again, does not fully engage with the idea to enhance impact. One of the aspects of structure which detracts from the essay is the fact that, at times, the candidate is repetitive in that they revisit the panic attack (tears, breathing, hiding) and, although it could be argued that this goes towards emphasising the all-encompassing nature of their panic attacks, each description is not really rendered any differently and this then limits the impact. Overall, a structure is there, but is deemed to have limited impact at this level and therefore would be placed in the 6-4 band range.

Tone/mood

The tone of the piece is pretty consistent throughout in that pacing and nuance is limited at this level and not employed to great effect at all, and the piece stays very single-dimensional in terms of tone/mood. The essay does not often go beyond direct recounting of events, and when it does it is simple and limited at

this level, and oft repeated. At the end of paragraph 2, the typical engagement with feelings is established: "The first time it felt as if they would not let go. I ran upstairs. The next hour was spent hiding in the upstairs bathroom." with the mood here not showing much variation from the description of the bathroom in para 1: "that was the only time I was in there, every time after that I would refuse to go in". The questions in paragraphs 5 and 6 are straightforward and hint towards a more heightened emotional state, yet this section is not fully realised. Also, the piano section in paragraph 11 has moments of promise but once again is not fully realised. Taking all of this on board, the tone/mood is unsustainable and the authorial voice could be described as limited at this level and as such this falls into the 6-4 band range.

Expression

The candidate uses simple repetition throughout the piece as one of their significant techniques, for example: "not being safe, not being secure", "each day" & "every"; "for hours, for days, for weeks", "different" & "certain", "nobody" and "I can". They also use a series of questions in paragraphs 5 & 6; listing at different points in the essay; and personification of the piano and music. Fundamentally, a range of techniques are used but they are techniques employed with limited originality at this level and as such is placed in the 6-4 range.

As the essay has evidence that fully meets the standard described in the 6-4 band range, then the highest mark for that band range should be awarded and this piece has been awarded 6 marks.