

# Commentary on candidate evidence

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

## Candidate 1

The candidate was awarded **12 marks** for this broadly creative piece.

### Summary

This piece has been written in the form of a short story. It shows clear creative qualities and a clear grasp of the genre from the outset. The focus of the story is a train journey from Stirling to Glasgow taken by the central character, Hamish. It quickly becomes clear that the train journey is a metaphor for Hamish's life, with each paragraph covering a different period of his life. A number of key episodes are described, each prompted by something or someone he sees during the journey. His arrival at the end of his journey, his death, is the inevitable ending of the story.

### Content

The opening paragraph establishes the premise of the story with Hamish boarding the train and taking his seat in Stirling, beginning a journey he has taken many times before. In paragraph 2, the train passes the Wallace Monument, where Hamish remembers himself as an eight-year-old, playing heroic childhood games with his friends. This paragraph demonstrates the clear quality of the writing achieved by the candidate throughout the piece. As well as describing the children's games and feelings with some sensitivity, the writer makes the perceptive observation that: 'This naivety was what kept the boys young; the loss of innocence and belief that they could be whoever they wanted was a tragedy every man faced.'

The story goes on to introduce a younger adult version of Hamish via a passenger sitting opposite him, reminding him of beginning law school, then moving into his

legal career. The transition from inexperienced student to busy professional is clearly symbolised by skilful descriptions of his suit and briefcase. Starting law school, a 'too-big grey suit hung ungainly over his hands' with his briefcase 'containing nothing'. By the end of this section, 'his once oversized suit now looked tight for wear' and the briefcase is 'packed to the brim with papers'. This represents his development from youth to mature person.

The piece clearly evokes his first meeting with his wife-to-be, a memory triggered by seeing a couple on a bench at a station. Next, Lenzie station, symbolically 'The halfway point on Hamish's journey' reminds him of his wedding, and passing a playground reminds him of his own children's childhood. The metaphor of the journey through life continues.

The shift to a more sombre mood is introduced abruptly when the 'train made a sudden jolt'. This triggers memories of being at his wife's hospital bedside and their parting at her death: 'Her passing came with unbearable grief but also relief'. The final paragraph concludes with the journey's end and the final moments of Hamish's life. 'The train pulled into Queen Street ... Hamish stayed deadly still. This was it – the end of the journey'. The tension and finality contribute to an effective ending to Hamish's journey through life, as well as to the story. There is death but also reconciliation: 'He took one final breath and stepped into the arms of his wife.' This final detail brings the story to a satisfying conclusion.

## Style

Features of the short story genre are used clearly and, in places, skilfully, to create impact. The build-up of atmospheric details in the opening begins the journey effectively; the reconciliation of Hamish and his wife at the end provides a surprisingly optimistic twist. The metaphor of the train trip as the journey through life is clearly sustained throughout. The candidate emphasises the progress of the journey and of life, for example in 'the rhythmic clattering of the train wheels on the track was hypnotic.'

Individual sections are clear in terms of quality and invention. For example, the section on the start of Hamish's working life is well handled, with the clear contrast

between his life as student to busy lawyer. Throughout the story, the use of language is clear and at times strong and impressive, for example 'the low murmur of conversation, punctuated by the dim lighting cast a glow over the tables and faded leather chairs.'

## Overall

This is an inventive piece of creative writing which uses the extended metaphor of the journey through life clearly. The characterisation of Hamish is confident in places, especially in the earlier sections of his life. The inevitable ending of Hamish's death is neatly handled. The piece is placed at the top of the 12-10 category and was awarded 12 marks.

## Candidate 2

The candidate was awarded **10 marks** for this broadly creative piece.

### Summary

This is a broadly creative piece written in the form of a series of diary entries set during World War Two, between 1943 and 1945. The first-person narrative takes us through Charlie's experiences, covering parting from his parents; meeting his school friend Jack; the harsh winter of 1944 to 1945; and the loss of Jack during a special mission. The final section of the diary details Charlie's painful responsibility of informing Jack's parents of their son's heroic and inspirational role.

### Content

From the start, this piece demonstrates clear attention to purpose and audience, using the diary format to explore the feelings and impressions of the main character and those around him. The candidate makes adequate use of pathetic fallacy as the conscription letter arrives for Charlie 'on a dull grey Monday as if the sky itself knew what was inside'. The relationships between the characters are clearly conveyed, as Charlie describes his mother's 'lavender scent wrapping around me like a memory I never wanted to lose' and his father who 'just nodded, though his eyes betrayed him'.

The second diary entry further establishes a sense of the tense and gloomy atmosphere, with the soldiers arriving in Normandy: 'The air thick with smoke and nerves.' We are introduced to the protagonist's friend, Jack, whose presence creates 'a warm sense of familiarity' as Charlie regards him as 'my anchor, even back in school'. The relative comfort of their reunion is cut short as 'the sirens blared' and the two friends are plunged into the deadly conflict. Jack is quickly established as a heroic figure, supporting Charlie, which sets up expectations as to the tragedy to come.

The third entry continues to demonstrate a clear grasp of the diary genre, with descriptive details evoking a bleak atmosphere, for example, 'The once bright fields were now barren and frozen'. Jack continues to be a role model through his determination, 'his steps slower than before, but he never stopped.' There is a suggestion of the impact that the stress of the conflict has had on their relationship as their 'camaraderie ... had been worn thin', as well as their disillusion because 'We had been promised the war would end by Christmas.'

In the penultimate extract, Charlie informs us that Jack and he have volunteered for a special mission, with Jack, typically, taking the lead. This revelation acts as an adequate narrative device leading to the death of Jack. The experience is explored with a clear sense of sensitivity, as the emotional impact of Jack's death is well handled, for example, when Charlie describes himself 'cradling him, whispering promises I could not keep'. The plot device of the 'plans' that Charlie grabs before heading back, edges more into adequate.

The final entry in the diary details Charlie's visit to Jack's parents to inform them of the 'truth' of Jack's death. The thematic concern of the impact of war is clearly conveyed as Charlie describes his condition: 'The medic called it shellshock, but it feels like something deeper, a hollow ache that nothing can fill.' The characterisation of Jack's parents is well handled: 'They invited me in, their politeness automatic, brittle.' The piece ends on an optimistic note, as Charlie comments that, although Jack is gone, the war 'could never take who he was.' Again, this is edging from clear into adequate.

## Style

The piece demonstrates clear use of structure and expression. The diary format allows the candidate to maintain a focus on events in a chronological order. Language is used clearly to highlight the challenging conditions, for example, 'Winter had gripped France with icy claws'. The description of Charlie as 'a man with too many ghosts' is an example of clear characterisation. At other times, characterisation is less successful, with some reliance on stereotypes. For example, when Charlie and Jack are asked about the mission, 'Jack volunteered without hesitation. "We

have come this far,” he said grinning, “What is one more fight?” Similarly, some of the language used to build atmosphere is adequate rather than clear, for example ‘his blood spreading through the waves.’

## Overall

This piece demonstrates clear attention to purpose and audience. Clear creative qualities are shown through the war setting and a clear grasp of the diary genre is evident. There is an attempt by the candidate to introduce thematic concerns through the references to the impact of war on soldiers and their loved ones. Linguistic features are mostly clear but edge into adequate at times, character and plot development sometimes relies on stereotypes associated with the genre. The piece sits at the bottom of the 12-10 range and was awarded 10 marks.

## Candidate 3

The candidate was awarded **11 marks** for this broadly discursive piece.

### Summary

The candidate has written an essay which focusses on the barriers and challenges women face when participating in rugby. This piece considers a number of ways in which they believe women who play rugby are disadvantaged. The writer explores the impact of general social gender inequality; the belief that women are not 'tough' enough to play the sport; the media not providing women's rugby coverage equal to the men's game; and how this inequality is reflected in training and treatment regimes for players, as well as the facilities available to female players and fans.

### Content

The candidate begins with a prologue-style series of short statements summarising stereotypical attitudes towards women who play rugby, as if spoken by someone who holds these views. The candidate immediately challenges such opinions in the introduction, stating clearly that 'this outdated and stereotypical viewpoint must change'. The piece summarises the steps necessary to 'encourage more girls to participate in rugby' leading to 'empowered female athletes both on and off the pitch'. The rest of the essay is structured clearly around dealing with these steps in sequence.

The first issue dealt with is how societal gender inequalities are demonstrated in the rugby world in terms of financial resources and incentives. The candidate covers the number of women employed in various roles, including playing and coaching; the gender pay gap; and the lack of women in highly paid roles. The question, 'how do we entice women into professional sport?' pinpoints the difficulties in encouraging female participation. This paragraph ends with a clear statement of the candidate's belief that women in rugby are treated as 'second class athletes' and will remain so until their 'effort and skill ... is acknowledged as with their male colleagues'.

The candidate next explores how ‘outdated, misogynistic stereotypes’ put pressure on women and girls. They use the example of Ilona Maher, a ‘trailblazer’ who challenges media views on what a female rugby player should be: the candidate describes her as popular, successful and an excellent role model, representing ‘body positivity and female empowerment’. The candidate’s clear understanding and engagement with the topic is shown in comments such as ‘she cannot be an exception to people’s perceptions’ and ‘Her media presence has shone a spotlight in gender inequality in rugby.’

The candidate goes on to explain how lack of media coverage and representation has a detrimental impact on the way women’s rugby is viewed. Statistical evidence is used to support the view that such ‘scarce media coverage’ leaves audiences believing that the women’s game is ‘irrelevant and unimportant’. They then go on to state clearly the benefits that would arise from a more equal allocation of media coverage to the women’s game.

In the following two paragraphs the candidate focuses on additional areas of inequality within the sport. There is clear evidence of research and selection of supporting information. This has enabled the writer to construct a clear argument regarding women’s second-class status, shown in the allocation of suitable facilities for training, treatment of injuries and as spectators of the sport.

In the conclusion, the candidate revisits each of the key strands of their argument and clearly restates the importance of addressing each of these to effect change in women’s rugby. The piece ends by revisiting the negative views voiced at the start: these have been turned around to present a positive view of women’s rugby, ending with ‘Women do it too!’.

## Style

The candidate’s expression throughout the essay is clear and the structure clearly enhances the overall argument and persuasive purpose of the piece. Language is used clearly and with emotive impact throughout, for example ‘outdated’, ‘second class athletes’, ‘ridiculous comments’, and demonstrates the candidate’s belief that change is not only desirable, but necessary.

There is clear evidence of careful research throughout the piece and statistics are used to reinforce the candidate's point of view, for example 'While rugby made up 22% of all sports coverage, less than 2% of this was for the women's game.' This allows the candidate to make a clear, reasoned comment on the impact of this inequality: 'it is no wonder that that general public know far more about men's sport'. This pattern of evidence and comment is used repeatedly throughout the piece.

## **Overall**

This piece of writing shows clear understanding of and engagement with the topic, with careful research and selection of evidence used to support a clear line of thought. The candidate uses linguistic features to convey persuasive force and the piece is structured clearly to enhance the purpose and meaning. It is placed in the middle of the 12-10 range and was awarded 11 marks.

## Candidate 4

The candidate was awarded **11 marks** for this broadly discursive piece.

### Summary

This piece discusses the reasons for a perceived decline in the success of the 'Marvel cinematic universe'. The candidate presents a clear argument that the proliferation of Marvel films has led to a lessening of quality, leaving fans disappointed. The piece then goes on to consider further reasons for diminishing profits before suggesting how the situation might be remedied. The conclusion expresses hope that Marvel will address the problems and ensure its future success.

### Content

The opening paragraph contrasts the impressive past of Marvel studios with its current decline. A question sets up the premise for the rest of the essay: 'How did this happen?' This is followed by a series of minor sentences offering possible answers: 'Excessive releases. Worse quality. Poorer story-lines.' The candidate goes on to work through the problems identified, following a clear line of thought.

The issue of the decline in quality is addressed through a series of clearly expressed opinions, firstly as a production problem, with time pressures resulting in shoddy CGI. The candidate considers the specific example of *Ant Man and Wasp Quantumania*, in which the technological aspects were 'absolutely abysmal', backing up this view with a professional reviewer's opinion. The piece then turns to the 'storylines and character development', contrasting the 'rich and three dimensional' characters of the past with the 'bland and boring' ones of today. The candidate identifies the coupling of comedy and the darkness of the villain in *Thor Love and Thunder* as a failure. They make the concession that 'In defter hands, it could work', but the uneasy combination of 'jokes' with 'dark and serious scenes' is considered problematic. A dismissive quotation from the star of the movie himself reinforces the argument.

The candidate moves on to other problems from the 'endless' list: 'the rise of streaming platforms' fuelling the decline of cinema-going; the poor quality of the films deterring many fans; criticism within the fan base itself. The candidate states that, rather than 'superhero fatigue', the issues are 'bad writing fatigue'. To justify this point, the candidate provides a list of successful superhero films. The question 'So what does this tell us?' reinforces the key point: 'superhero movies and TV shows are still loved by many; the movies and TV shows just have to be good.'

In the final section of the essay, the candidate considers potential remedies for Marvel's problems. These are clearly explained: 'compelling character arcs', 'storylines that connected to each other' and 'balancing the humour with emotion'. While asking 'is it possible to fix what's happened to Marvel?' the candidate suggests that the release of a single movie in 2024 and the successful Marvel spin-offs airing as a series on streaming services are doing just that. This leads to the possibly unexpected positive tone of the conclusion: 'Marvel has finally learned from their mistakes.' The final question references the title: 'Could it be that the unstoppable titan has returned?' suggesting that the candidate is hopeful for the future.

## Style

The candidate uses language clearly throughout the piece to discuss and persuade. Expression is consistently clear, and the structure enhances the candidate's purpose.

Persuasive features include questions, the use of 'we' to include the reader, italics to convey the energy and force of the writer's voice and short sentences. Imagery is used clearly, for example 'titan' to tie the title and conclusion together and 'reignite the flame they have blown out' to highlight a moment of transition in the line of thought.

A clear linguistic feature of the piece is the candidate's use of tone. The exasperation of 'And don't even get me started on the screaming goats' adds passion to the writing. The list of single sentence names of the 'bland and boring' characters is dismissive with a moment of humour when the writer's frustration breaks through: 'Gorr the God-Butcherer, for goodness' sake'. The candidate's engagement with the

topic is evident, for example in a triplet at the conclusion: 'I want them to improve ... succeed ... to see good Marvel movies again.'

## **Overall**

This piece is placed in the 12-10 range. It has a clear purpose and structure which takes the reader through a range of relevant arguments, clearly expressed. The essay is also clear in terms of its impact and use of language. It is placed in the middle of the 12-10 range and was awarded 11 marks.