

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate A

Portfolio-writing: How Music Broadens The Mind

The candidate was awarded **9 marks** for this broadly discursive piece of writing.

Summary

In this broadly discursive essay, the candidate considers the ways in which music can enhance brain function. Although the candidate's stance is clear at times, the line of thought is mainly adequate throughout. There is adequate use of research and selection of details to support the candidate's view on the beneficial effects of music.

Content

The piece opens with a lengthy sentence setting the context of the discussion – 'research has found that music has a positive effect on the brain'. The title has already introduced the idea of music broadening the mind, and the subsequent listing of music's benefits – 'improved memory...aided concentration...higher grades...boosts creativity...' – provides a clear indication of the candidate's intention to focus on the specific psychological benefits of music.

The opening sentence of the second paragraph repeats music's 'several benefits' and acts as an adequate structural signpost for the consequent elaboration on different benefits. The fairly brief handling of the 'Mozart Effect' demonstrates adequate, rather than clear, use of research. In this same paragraph, the candidate moves on to discussing how different types of music affect brain function when studying, mentioning Beethoven, film soundtracks and 'nature sounds'. The notion of certain types of music as a distraction is touched on when the candidate picks up briefly on the point that studying is unlikely to be effective when accompanied by 'overtly fast or upbeat' music, especially with 'distracting lyrics'. At this point in the essay, there is an assertive and repetitive quality to the argument. The candidate repeatedly refers to studies which 'have found' or 'were found', and there are a number of references to 'overly fast' music.

The candidate then reiterates the benefits before moving on to compare the different levels of benefits gained by students who play musical instruments and those who do not – but who still can benefit from listening to music. This quite complex idea is dealt with briefly. The line of thought continues with a swift change of topic, moving to how music can improve the lives of those suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Here, the image of music 'metaphorically [opening] doors in the minds of elderly people' reveals the candidate's clear engagement with the topic. Oppositional evidence on music as a distracting influence is then discussed. Two specific pieces of research are cited before the paragraph ends with a comment about 'other studies'. This counter-evidence is reported without comment by the candidate, although it supports a view contrary to the

candidate's conclusion. The essay ends with a summation of 'the many positive aspects music can have on a person.'

Style

In terms of structure and line of thought, this essay is adequate throughout. The opening and concluding paragraphs provide the context and summation of the candidate's argument respectively, and assist in conveying the clear engagement which is apparent at some points in this essay. The essay is a genuine attempt at discursive writing, considering both the positive and negative features of listening to music. The structure is adequate: introductory paragraph; two paragraphs which explore the benefits of music; one paragraph which presents evidence suggesting music is in fact distracting; a conclusion. This straightforward structure enables the candidate to present both sides of the argument to the reader, with supporting evidence used in a methodical way.

The candidate uses some of the conventions of discursive writing clearly: for example evidence is organised methodically to support statements. However, linguistic features are adequately – rather than clearly – used to persuade. For example, lists of benefits are often used to emphasise the positive: '...were found to have better motor control, more superior memories, reading ability, auditory skills...'; 'music can aid concentration, boost creativity, reduce stress and anxiety...'. The candidate's transition from the discussion of the positive to the negative features of music is signalled adequately by the use of the conjunctive adverb 'however'. Occasionally, the candidate's sentences are overlong.

Overall

This piece was placed in the 9-7 mark range. Although the candidate demonstrates a clear engagement with the topic in places, the structure and expression of this essay remain in the adequate mark range throughout. The essay was therefore awarded **9 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate B

Portfolio-writing: Moorman

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing.

Summary

The candidate has written a short story in the science-fiction genre about David Harker, a solitary man approaching fifty who lives on Marsden Moor. In the isolation of the moor, David has, what he believes to be, a close encounter with a UFO. When he tries to convince the regulars in his local pub of his sighting his account is dismissed. David sets out to prove that he is not suffering from delusions. The story ends with David and two companions sighting the mysterious UFO, from which they run away, agreeing 'that they would never to talk about [it] again'.

Content

Attention to purpose and audience is adequate and the candidate makes a genuine effort to employ the creative features of a science-fiction story. The story opens by offering details to establish the central character of David – a man who had 'often considered moving into the village just so that he could be around other people' and is 'reluctant' to walk his dog in the pouring rain – which suggest an adequate understanding of creative qualities. The night of the first UFO sighting is described with an attempt at atmospheric description: 'rain lashed sideways across the moors' with 'branches...being blown about like paper'.

Later in the story, there is an attempt to evoke a number of familiar tropes of the genre: the solitary eye-witness whom no one believes; the dog that barks 'frantically' at the approach of the UFO; the car engine that mysteriously stops working. Whilst these references may be familiar, they are indicators of a candidate showing an adequate understanding of the genre and a genuine attempt to write a story using instantly recognisable features of that genre. There is an attempt by the candidate to introduce thematic concerns (such as the isolation, the existence of alien beings and the treatment of those who say they have witnessed such phenomena) but these are not developed and therefore remain adequate.

The candidate creates an adequate sense of character and place. The description of the moors and the pub is appropriate to the genre and draws upon well-known examples in an adequate manner. The main character of the story and the accompanying cast of 'sceptical locals' feel familiar. There is an attempt to develop the relationship between David and Joe, the barman, who is more sympathetic to David and less inclined to dismiss him as drunk or deluded. Joe notices how shocked David is after the first sighting: 'You look like you've seen a ghost'; David 'desperately' pleads, 'Joe, please tell me you believe me.' Again,

the idea of the one friend who can be confided in is a common feature. Thus, the candidate draws from a shared cultural well to write a story that fulfils the reader's expectations of the science-fiction genre. Attempts to use mild humour include the moment when describing the 'three men and a dog' who run from the alien and agree to never talk about it again. The end of the story is anti-climactic.

Style

The piece has a straightforward linear storyline, in which each section develops as the narrative moves from David's first encounter with the UFO, through his attempt to convince the locals of the second encounter, to the third and final encounter where contact is made. The plot is clearly centred on the one main character, exploring his three UFO sightings, interspersed with visits to the local pub.

From the outset, the candidate attempts to foreshadow later events, telling the reader 'at night time, it was a different story' and referencing the Stephen Hawking documentary about aliens. Pathetic fallacy is used when David ventures out 'one particular foul night' and a sense of unease is established on the 'dark, sinister moors' on a 'foul night'. The piece demonstrates some understanding of the genre, adequately using a range of linguistic features: imagery ('David ran like Usain Bolt'), word choice ('zoomed off'), parenthesis ('– which miraculously started –') and dialogue ('I'm telling you, I saw summat. It were like nowt I've ever seen'). These features of the chosen genre are used adequately to tell the story and create an impression of character and place.

Overall

This piece is placed in the 9-7 mark range. There is adequate evidence of creative qualities, and structure and use of linguistic features are adequate overall. This piece is described fully by the statements in the 9-7 mark range. For these reasons, the piece was awarded **8 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate C

Portfolio-writing: In the Jaws of the Grand Dragon

The candidate was awarded **13 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing.

Summary

This is a personal/reflective essay about the experience of piano lessons, focusing on one particular occasion. It is a sensitive and witty account, conveying how the lessons are perceived as something to be dreaded, with the piano taking on the characteristics of a monster lying in wait.

Content

There is strong attention to purpose and audience from the start, with the dramatic opening paragraph demonstrating strong creative qualities. The piano teacher's living room is 'the lair of a black dragon', the piano itself 'an uncontrollable beast that humiliated all in its path'. The metaphor of the piano as dragon develops in this paragraph, the open piano becoming a 'gaping mouth', the keys 'daunting...teeth' – and recurs throughout the piece.

A humorous tone and strong sense of the writer's personality are established from the start and sustained throughout. The candidate's experience of Friday is described with a clear sense of involvement, comparing the stress-free Friday nights enjoyed by other young people with the 'detested... Piano Day'. Strong descriptive language is used to convey the candidate's sense of impending calamity in anticipation of the lesson, for example, 'Every second... took me closer to the doom I knew awaited me', 'dragged myself', 'dreaded creak of her footsteps' and 'her dark shadow looming up'.

The initial description of the teacher is slightly less nuanced – clear rather than strong – for example, 'her wizened body perfectly matched her stern, traditional personality'. There follows a more successful evocation of her personality and the depressing atmosphere in her living room. The skilful use of observational details creates a strong sense of the candidate's perspective: 'she bared her yellow teeth in what I assumed to be a smile' and the 'half-completed crosswords and a box of dried out felt-tip pens'.

Description of the lesson continues, from the candidate's delaying tactics and attempts at playing, punctuated with the teacher's usually critical responses – 'her beady eyes glared', 'her jaw clenching and unclenching' and 'making me repeat the same agonising passage until I got it just right'. A strong sense of self-awareness is sustained as the candidate conveys frustration, embarrassment and acknowledgement of the teacher's superior skill, for example, 'This was how the melody was supposed to sound, yet I couldn't perfect it' and 'I sat down, ashamed'.

There is relief as the lesson ends with the ‘melancholy bell...indicating the next poor pupil to endure their thirty minutes of suffering.’ However, at the last minute, the teacher ‘announced’ another ordeal, the Grade 4 exam. The candidate’s feelings are explored with a strong degree of insight, revealed through the contrast between inner turmoil and outward response: ‘Wanting to scream “NO!”; I politely nodded’.

The piece ends with the candidate moving from the literal and metaphorical cold into the warm car and Mum’s ‘welcoming smile’. However, the prospect of pizza provides only temporary comfort due to thoughts ‘already lurking...of next week’s piano lesson in the lair of the black dragon’, an effective return to the image introduced in the title and opening.

Style

The skilful use of descriptive language is a strength of this piece, creating tension, a tone of despair and wry humour. Examples include the extended metaphor of the piano as dragon, description of the room and the teacher. The use of specific details creates a vivid picture of the teacher, an intimidating presence, for whom the candidate expresses dread, occasional physical revulsion, for example when she ‘would dab the end of her nose with a scrunched up tissue’ – and yet genuine admiration: ‘I watched in awe.’ Contrast is used effectively, for example when both pupil and teacher tackle the challenging passage: ‘I threw my fingers wildly at the keys’, whereas ‘Her curled old fingers glided effortlessly across the keys’.

Expression is mostly confident and varied, for example the use of questions to convey the candidate’s anxiety before the lesson. At times, the description is clear rather than strong, but the overall effect is of a candidate in control of the genre’s linguistic features. Structure is linear and, on the whole, effective, building up from the anticipation of the lesson, to the experience itself, to the escape at the end. The closing paragraph perhaps seems a little rushed.

Overall

The piece is placed in the 15-13 mark range. There is a strong sense of the writer’s personality and experience, with skilful use of language. Due to the occasional movement into clear rather than strong, it was awarded **13 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate D

Portfolio-writing: Why Zoos Should be Endangered

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

Summary

This is a broadly discursive piece of writing in which the candidate discusses the controversial issue of zoos. The candidate considers arguments for and against zoos, providing evidence to support the points made, before coming to a conclusion and suggesting a possible compromise on the future role of zoos.

Content

In the opening paragraph, the candidate considers the contentious nature of zoos – behind the ‘amazing experience’ of most families visiting zoos is the ‘harassment’ of the animals leading to the ‘commonly held belief that animals do not belong in zoos’. The candidate suggests ‘another point of view’, that zoos can be ‘beneficial...serving as a place of safety’ for animals endangered by human activity; ‘hunting’ and ‘reduction of their natural habitat’. The essay remains focussed on these conflicting views throughout, exhibiting a clear attention to purpose.

Following the introduction, the essay explores ‘why zoos should be banned’. The candidate first considers practical issues: insufficient space and the stress-related impact this has on animals; the inability of animals born in zoos to acquire survival skills; and how removing an individual animal from the wild might impact on the survival of its species. These issues are dealt with clearly, with supporting evidence and reasons. For example, the candidate provides the shocking example of elephants, ‘held captive’ in enclosures ‘on average a thousand times smaller’ than they need to travel their typical ‘30 miles a day’. This combination of emotive language and research-based evidence recurs throughout the essay, showing the candidate’s clear engagement with the topic. There are also references to increased use of medication to manage the mental health of zoo animals and the danger of species becoming ‘less genetically diverse’.

The candidate moves on to consider the issue from a moral perspective, challenging our ‘right to capture, confine and breed other animals’. Various examples of suffering are used to support this line of thought, leading to the conclusion, clearly stated by the candidate, that ‘often zoos are unable to replicate the normal living conditions that wildlife survive in’, even at times failing to ‘provide safe or secure shelter.’

The link, ‘On the other hand...’ signals a change to arguments in favour of keeping animals in zoos. The candidate first points out that zoos have ‘improved significantly’ over time and now provide ‘mini-habitats that resemble the animals’

natural environment.’ Other positive aspects of zoos are explored: breeding programmes for endangered species, research into animal ecosystems and animal husbandry. Various examples are cited to provide clear support for this line of thought.

The conclusion of the essay is clearly signalled, with the candidate acknowledging both sides and putting forward a compromise position – ‘zoos should only contain wild animals on the endangered list.’ This, the candidate argues, would provide a positive solution for both animals and humans.

Throughout the essay, the candidate demonstrates a clear understanding of the areas of contention: practical and moral objections balanced against improvement to zoos and their research function. There is clear evidence of careful research and selection of evidence, for example, the Scarborough Sea Life Centre, Virginia Zoo and the Pere David’s deer breeding programme.

Style

Appropriate linguistic features are clearly used to develop the argument. There is emotive language, for example in the first paragraph (‘gawking’ of the humans, the way visitors ‘chuck food...knock on glass’, the ‘boredom or frustration’ of the animals) which contrasts with the language of the last paragraph (the ‘respectful behaviour’ of the children, the animals ‘safer’ and ‘provided with food, shelter and medicine’). This contrast is clearly used as a structural device to persuade us of the benefits – for both animals and humans – of the candidate’s compromise. The final words, describing children with ‘acres of space to run wild and free as memories are captured for a lifetime’, evoke an idyll where both children and animals are (relatively) free.

Expression is clear, with varied sentence structure, for example the inversion of ‘Gone are the old steel-bar enclosures and cement cages’.

The essay maintains a clearly structured line of thought throughout, reinforced by the use of signalling words to indicate the stages in the discussion: ‘on top of this...in addition...on the other hand...furthermore...finally...in conclusion’.

Overall

This piece was placed in the 12-10 mark range. Engagement with the topic, use of evidence, line of thought, structure and linguistic features are all clear. This piece is described fully by the statements in the 12-10 mark range and was awarded **11 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate E

Portfolio-writing: Having a Bad day

The candidate was awarded **11 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing.

Summary

Writing in Scots, the candidate adopts the persona of someone who has just been made unemployed. The narrator is now sitting in Glasgow's Central Station waiting for the train home. While doing so, the narrator observes a range of characters at the station: a teenager, an old woman, a girl on her phone, a seriously ill child. Through these observations, the narrator realises that life is not so bad after all and that redemption is possible.

Content

This is a story of salvation and hope and as such the candidate shows clear attention to purpose by adhering to the traditional narrative arc of such a piece. The opening paragraph establishes the narrator's desperate situation, with the station representing a transitional time in life and the experience of waiting for the train creating a sense of limbo. Newly-unemployed and in tears, the narrator wonders how going forward will be possible: 'How am A goanie pay the rent? How can A feed myself?' At this lowest point, looking around the station prompts the thought '...could any ae these folk's lives possibly be worse than mine...?'

The candidate uses this question to trigger the four paragraphs which follow, each of which focuses on a particular character at the station. Each of these paragraphs follows a similar and somewhat repetitive pattern: the narrator imagining that a character is leading a very unfulfilled or unhappy life before realising that the life is much more positive than it first appears. The teenager is not marginalised and lonely; the old woman still has the support of her husband; the young girl can laugh at the comments of her online trolls; despite her illness, the sick child is happy and outgoing. Structurally, the resilience of the sick child brings this part of the story to a kind of climax, emphasising that there is hope and happiness in even the darkest situation.

In a clearly structured piece, this leads to the narrator viewing life in a much more positive way. The despair of the opening is replaced by hope and optimism at the conclusion: the narrator's train finally comes in and the narrator is now 'just happy tae be alive n healthy.' The narrative arc is complete and the narrator feels strengthened by seeing how other people deal with adversity: 'Wance in a while, it pays mair than wages tae tak' a keek around 'n' pat yersel' in someone else's bits.'

Style

Being written in Scots is one of the story's most interesting stylistic features. Generally, this is well handled; the Scots voice is clearly and consistently maintained throughout the piece. The persona of the narrator – a fundamentally sympathetic character who is concerned for others – is established and developed clearly. The first person perspective is used clearly to create interesting and, at times, humorous observations in the descriptions of individual characters: 'A feel bad fir the boy and hinks tae maself under aw that dark clothing wae skulls plastered aw iver it, n the jet black eye make up, he is probably a lovely young boy who is just trying tae express himself.' Overall, these pen portraits are engaging with some sharp observations: describing the old woman, it says 'it must be hard watching the world change fae everyoane being sociable n folk taking the time tae visit n write tae others, tae watch everyone being brainwashed by social media n being obsessed wae their appearance n that.' The candidate's, at times, vivid use of language is one of the story's successful aspects.

The series of vignettes forms a clear structure which enhances the meaning of the piece. The cumulative experience of seeing human beings, resilient and living life to the full, affects the narrator, especially the child whose 'warm look' seems to pass on some of her positivity. However, these individual pen portraits are quite brief and the movement in the individual descriptions from negativity to positivity becomes quite formulaic. Similarly, the transition from one character to the next is handled in quite an abrupt manner.

Overall

This piece was placed in the 12-10 marks range. It has a clear structure which leads to a positive conclusion. Linguistic features are used clearly to create impact. The use of Scots is well-handled and adds to the characterisation in the story. It was awarded **11 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate F

Portfolio-writing: I Don't Mean To Be Dramatic But...

The candidate was awarded **12 marks** for this broadly discursive piece of writing.

Summary

In this broadly discursive piece, the candidate, writing in an often humorous style, discusses the merits of drama and argues that the subject should be a compulsory part of the Scottish curriculum. Although the opinions presented are based on personal experience, it should be noted that this is a perfectly valid approach to writing a 'broadly discursive' piece. The candidate's experiences constitute the research, and this is used thoughtfully.

Content

The candidate's ideas are characterised by personal experience, which drives the opinion that drama should be more widely taught in schools because of the opportunities it provides for skills development. The candidate uses personal experiences to discuss the lack of drama provision; compulsory PE; the benefits of taking part in drama performances; and the skills that can be developed as a result of this.

The essay shows clear attention to purpose and clear understanding of the topic from the outset. A clear line of thought runs through the essay and the candidate demonstrates a convincing stance. In response to the mistaken belief that the study of drama should be exclusive to those with a talent for performing, the candidate states, 'This is so wrong'. This allows the clear establishment of the essay's main argument: that drama offers many opportunities to develop young people's skills. A long second section focuses on the skills developed by drama, covering the flexibility it offers: opportunities for participation in different aspects of a performance, teamwork, and confidence. Clear engagement with the topic is evidenced by the comparison to compulsory PE and this is heightened by the tongue-in-cheek tone when describing a stereotypical PE lesson.

As the essay develops, the candidate discusses other, less predictable, aspects of the issue: the importance of cultural enrichment (perhaps less well handled); lack of opportunity in the wider community; and the fixed mind-sets of boys, in particular, which leads to an interesting discussion about male stereotypes. The content covers a range of ideas connected to the main argument, some of which are fresh and thought-provoking. For example, the argument that PE, a traditionally-accepted given in the curriculum, is actually of less benefit than drama, is an interesting idea which challenges our assumptions. The conclusion is clear: involvement in drama can enhance many aspects of personal development, and schools must therefore 'reconsider the beneficial impact' of drama.

Style

Underpinning this essay is the personal commitment and enthusiasm conveyed by the writer. This is sustained throughout the piece and, combined with several linguistic features associated with the genre, is used clearly to create the piece's persuasive force.

The style of writing is characterised by a conversational, informal tone. Expression is clear and, in places, confident. At times, questions, such as 'I mean, what's that meant to teach you?', and direct address, for example 'Don't get me wrong...' are used to engage the reader. Sentence structure can be varied: there is use of repetition; lists; single-word sentences; questions; parenthesis. Humour is used to convey thought, for example, "Come on boys, get a grip. Man up and give it a chance!" All of these combine to create impact. The candidate contrasts PE with drama to emphasise drama's merits. At times, the writer uses emotive word choice to heighten the contrast: PE is described as 'barbaric', its support 'troglodyte', whereas drama is 'progressive' and allows students to 'shine'. This deliberate choice of language conveys the writer's convincing stance.

The essay's structure enhances its purpose and meaning. The candidate signals the progression of ideas with clear topic sentences – 'I suppose the biggest thing that irks me most...'; 'Despite all this being said...' – which lends fluency to the line of thought. Although the second paragraph is perhaps over-long, it does hold together by focusing on the skills gained through drama.

The candidate ends neatly by playing on the idea of dramatic performance, directly addressing the reader with an effective pun: 'now is the time to act'.

Overall

This piece is placed in the 12-10 mark range. It is a clear piece of writing, edging towards confident in places, with a convincing stance and commitment to the topic. For these reasons it was placed at the top of the 12-10 range and awarded **12 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate G

Portfolio-writing: Ophelia

The candidate was awarded **15 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing.

Summary

In this broadly creative piece, the candidate takes on the persona of a photographer. He is looking back at a series of photographs he has taken of Ophelia, starting in the 1960s and concluding with her death some time after 1976. The exact nature of both their relationship and her death are somewhat ambiguous, adding to the intrigue of the story.

Content

The piece exhibits strong attention to purpose and strong creative qualities right from the start, when the narrator opens ‘the padlocked tin box’ which contains the ‘most precious possessions’, photographs of the woman he later refers to as ‘Ophelia’. His emotion is conveyed skilfully through ‘My hand trembles almost imperceptibly’ and the comment that the photos ‘not only document my past, but possess my present’. The story then develops through the description of a series of photographs which capture Ophelia in a range of locations. Through the writer’s skilful use of language, in each of the individual scenes a very strong sense of time, place and character is created. Ophelia herself is, paradoxically, vividly present and strangely elusive. In the different environments, she stands out and yet is at times immersed in the life of the place. The narrator’s love for her seems obsessive, possibly destructive, and the subtle references to *Hamlet* throughout add depth and mystery to the pleasure of reading the story. There is skilful thematic development: the ephemeral nature of human experience, including love, is shown through the narrator’s desire to keep a moment ‘alive’ through a photograph. The idea of the camera capturing the woman’s spirit and giving her life after death is one of many indicating skilful command of the genre.

The first photograph is of a street in 1960s London, which the narrator describes as ‘packed like a tin of sardines, colourless sardines devoid of life, freedom, creativity’. His success in this world is bitterly summed up: ‘this façade of a businessman, a hollow picture of power and money... I was empty’. The vision of Ophelia, ‘a constant, becalmed’ contrasts with the teeming crowds and her impact on the narrator is skilfully conveyed in the succinct sentence ‘Serenity in a sea of chaos’.

The candidate continues to use richly evocative description in the episodes which accompany the subsequent photographs. In Goa, ‘the heavy, heady smells of spices and bolt upon bolt of silk’ contrasts with ‘a side street of the market that the sun seemed to miss, a corner on the page that the child had forgotten to colour in.’ The dreamy quality of ‘a dusky evening’ in Malawi where ‘she

meandered' gives way to the 'outpouring of laughter and sharing news' as a busy bus arrives. It is noticeable that Ophelia reaches out in these places: a starved dog, a poor child are touched by her warm love and life, whereas the narrator remains distant, observing, taking the photos.

The penultimate photograph depicts an 'increasingly frail' Ophelia with 'pale skin, translucent like china, so delicate' about to leave by train, while the narrator watches. With the final picture, taken after her death, the story reaches its climax. There is a disturbing quality about the narrator's transformation of the woman into a piece of art, which again demonstrates a skilful command of the genre.

Style

The piece is characterised by confident and varied expression throughout. Each of the individual sections is vividly realised thanks to the selection of detail and highly creative use of linguistic features such as varied sentences, vocabulary and imagery. Examples include the scene in Goa and the final study of death: 'curled and cold as alabaster', 'winding limbs of the reeds' and 'a crown of chestnut spindles'. The candidate's expression is confident, elegant and controlled.

Structure is used effectively to enhance the story's meaning: the use of individual photographs allows the candidate to evoke the different stages of the relationship, culminating in the powerful climax of her death. It also acts as an extended metaphor for the nature of their relationship: the narrator strives to 'capture' Ophelia, keeping her frozen in a moment in time – and, through her death, he succeeds. The references to *Hamlet*, woven throughout, enhance the intrigue and impact of the story.

Overall

This piece was placed in the 15-13 mark range. It is a skilful, confident piece of creative writing with beautifully observed descriptions, detailed characterisation and an intriguing structure. It was placed at the top of the 15-13 range and awarded **15 marks**.

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate H

Portfolio-writing: Cyberchondria

The candidate was awarded **15 marks** for this broadly discursive piece of writing.

Summary

In this broadly discursive piece, the candidate discusses the impact that the internet has had on our personal health. In particular, the essay explores our tendency to suffer from a form of hypochondria exacerbated by the availability of online medical information. The candidate concludes that we should use online medical sites in a more informed way.

Content

This piece demonstrates strong attention to purpose and a sustained line of thought. The candidate covers a range of important issues: the dangers of mistaken personal diagnosis; the value of reputable sites; our tendency to medicalise everyday feelings; how the internet leads to the most extreme conclusions; the importance of consulting medical professionals. Each of these sections is covered in a detailed and insightful way.

The essay's opening skilfully engages the reader by listing symptoms which introduce the topic neatly: 'Bit of a sore head: probably migraine, cluster headache, brain tumour, CJD...' Direct address to the reader is used confidently throughout, for example in the climactic end of the opening paragraph: 'confront the real diagnosis – you are a cyberchondriac.'

There is strong understanding and engagement with the topic throughout and the candidate's detailed research is skilfully integrated into the piece. Examples in the early stages of the essay include the references to rare diseases and research from Imperial College, London regarding numbers of appointments prompted by internet-led fears.

Having outlined the nature and extent of the problem, the candidate acknowledges the value of online diagnostic tools, such as those available via the NHS, especially in the climate of financial restrictions. The strong line of thought continues as the candidate urges caution when using online diagnosis: a series of lists reinforce the argument that our problems should not necessarily be medicalised. For example, we don't need 'to put a name to our ache, pain or lethargy'; we could 'get more sleep, eat healthier, get fitter'; our 'complex' lives mean 'we get anxious, we get sad, we get frustrated, we get overwhelmed'.

Towards the end of the essay, the candidate considers potential problems of online diagnosis: the likelihood of users misdiagnosing their common conditions as something rare and deadly – and, more dangerously, failing to seek medical

help from an actual professional for an unknown serious condition. The candidate urges the reader to value 'something it is unlikely that the internet will ever have: instinct'. This argument is characteristic of the piece in that it conveys the depth and complexity of the candidate's line of thought.

The essay concludes by accepting that, in the field of medical diagnosis, as in other areas of society, 'the replacement of the humble human with a highly technological machine is on the rise'. The candidate reasons that a compromise offers the best way forward, 'to guide people to the best, most trustworthy sites.'

Style

The essay demonstrates skilful use of linguistic features to develop and discuss the topic. The candidate's use of complex vocabulary is evident throughout, for example 'irrational fears fuelled by researching the internet' and 'as much as we may mock those whose reliance on cyberbetic diagnosis...'. Expression is confident and varied, for example the use of lists, questions and repetition, which effectively add emphasis, as in 'Surely it is better to be well-informed than rely on rumour, heresy and old wives' tales?' and 'It is way more likely...It is far more probable...'

Skilful engagement of the reader is maintained throughout. Having captured the reader's attention in the opening section, the tone of the piece continues to punctuate moments of humour in a serious treatment of the topic, culminating in a strong conclusion in which the writer's control of language is used to powerful effect: 'We need to master the use of the internet in healthcare rather than become enslaved by it.' The structure skilfully enhances the meaning, moving fluently through the stages of the candidate's sophisticated line of thought. The linking is smooth, with wry touches such as quoting 'Hypochondria is the only illness I don't have' and 'However, before this becomes another Luddite condemnation of the internet...'

Overall

This piece was placed in the 15-13 mark range. It is a strongly-argued, well-informed and confident piece of writing. Throughout, the candidate demonstrates stylish and imaginative control of language. It was placed at the top of the 15-13 range and awarded **15 marks**.