

# Commentary on candidate evidence

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

## Candidate 1

The candidate was awarded **8 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing: **My Tennis Identity**.

### Summary

The candidate has written a broadly creative piece in the form of a personal/reflective essay about their enjoyment of tennis. The piece describes different experiences linked to tennis, including training and travelling to compete, and comments on the positive impact the sport has had, more broadly, on life.

### Content

The piece shows adequate attention to purpose and audience from the start. It opens with a short paragraph which summarises some of the challenges presented by commitment to tennis: long hours of training, emotional extremes when pushing yourself towards excellence and pressures of competing. The question: 'is it worth it?' is posed – a question the essay will go on to answer by weighing up the challenges and benefits of the sport.

The second paragraph provides an adequate account of training in Majorca. This includes comments on the unfamiliar court and playing in hot weather, with the candidate acknowledging that the 'tough...conditions...motivated me to achieve as much as I could'. The pattern of describing challenging aspects of the sport, followed by commenting on how these challenges have had a positive impact is one followed by the candidate throughout. This approach allows the candidate to explore experiences with adequate reflection and involvement.

The essay goes on to describe the candidate's intense training schedule throughout the year, methodically setting out the various activities involved. We are given some sense of the demands, balanced with the positives: 'I can play all year round and keep my high level up' despite 'tiredness and frustration'. The candidate then lists examples of role models, focusing particularly on Maria Sharapova and citing the benefits, physical and mental, of playing against older players. There is some sense of involvement in statements such as 'helped me to go into every match with an open mind and go for the win each time'.

There follows a brief look at the challenges of playing tennis in Scotland throughout the year outwith the central city areas: there is mention of the issues involved, rather than a clear consideration of them. One memorable competition is described in more detail, in particular a singles match where the candidate was the focus of attention. We gain an adequate sense of the candidate's excitement

and the positive impact of this experience: 'atmosphere was incredible', 'felt like I was playing at the Davies Cup', 'boosted my confidence massively'.

The focus shifts to long-term goals held by the candidate, including a career in Majorca as a tennis coach, enjoying the lifestyle, as well as the community of Spanish local people and coaches. There is humorous acknowledgement that fair skin might be a drawback: 'a large part of my wages would go towards sun cream' – again, an adequate sense of personality coming through.

The essay concludes with a summary of the positives of tennis, in terms of valuable memories, present experiences and aims for the future. This is a methodical and straightforward explanation which covers various points previously made and highlights playing in front of young players as an 'unbelievable feeling'. The candidate states: 'I feel Tennis has made me the person I am today'. We see again the adequate reflection which has characterized the piece throughout.

## Style

In terms of style, the piece demonstrates adequate expression and structure. Throughout, the candidate describes and comments on experiences using appropriate and straightforward vocabulary to communicate with the reader, for example, 'my motivation and dedication led on to greater things', 'even if they do get on my nerves sometimes' and 'this really inspired me to work towards my goal as this may be my future'. The essay is structured in paragraphs which each deal with a separate aspect of the tennis experience. Topics are introduced and linked together in an adequate way.

## Overall

This piece is placed in the 9-7 mark range. The candidate explores feelings and experiences with an adequate sense of reflection and involvement. An adequate sense of the writer's personality comes across – we are given indications of commitment, determination and a sense of humour. The essay is described fully by the statements in the 9-7 mark range. For this reason, the piece was awarded **8 marks**.

## Candidate 2

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

### Summary

This is a broadly creative piece in the form of a personal/reflective essay. The candidate has written about Christmas, focusing on memories of a typical Christmas Day in the past. As well as describing enjoyable activities including opening presents, playing in the snow and eating dinner, there is also some reflection on the passage of time and why Christmas means so much.

### Content

The opening paragraph signals the topic of the essay – Christmas, which the candidate says, 'I hold close to my heart', especially 'all the memories of Christmas past'. There is acknowledgement of how the passage of time inevitably means change, but the candidate maintains that the meaning underpinning family traditions endures. This paragraph contains an adequate sense of reflection, for example, 'things can't always stay the way we want them' and ends by introducing the idea of 'favourite memories...', which will be developed throughout most of the essay.

There follows an account of a typical Christmas morning, with the candidate's younger self 'running downstairs' to discover Santa's gifts. Descriptive touches such as the 'cold floor', 'tree lights' and sound of footsteps as the family arrives downstairs contribute to an adequate sense of involvement and we are given some impression of the personality of the writer, who now apologises 'profusely' for the early wake ups inflicted on the family. There is a moment of reflection on the deeper meaning of Christmas, beyond presents, though the candidate conceded 'it is very hard, as a young child, not to get swept away in the excitement of it all'. The pattern of description followed by a short reflective comment at the end of a paragraph is continued throughout the piece.

The essay moves on to describe the walk to gran's house for dinner, especially the snowball fight on the way, and an adequate, though genuine, feeling of fun and warmth is conveyed. The excitement of the snowballing begins with, 'Splat! The first snowball was launched across the road and landed right in my dad's back' and continued with, 'Splat! Another snowball has flown through the air and landed right in my brother's face'. There is a sense of involvement, achieved partly through the use of present tense in places. The candidate reflects on the loss of contact with her brother, which contributes to the adequate sense of the writer's personality.

There follow shorter, but similar, paragraphs on building a snowman, preparing dinner and after dinner quizzes. Each paragraph concludes with a brief, adequate comment reflecting on change, for example, 'This must have been the last time we had a white Christmas' and 'As I am older now, the responsibility of hosting falls upon me'.

The piece concludes by considering how the build up to Christmas contributes to the meaning and joy of the day itself. There is adequate reflection in statements such as ‘we all begin to feel properly in the festive spirit as soon as bonfire night is over’ and in the contrast between the ‘cold outside’ and feeling ‘warm in our hearts’.

## Style

In terms of style, the piece demonstrates adequate use of linguistic features, expression and structure. The opening and concluding paragraphs provide a frame for the memories of a typical happy Christmas from the candidate’s childhood. The main body of the essay breaks this day down into distinct aspects – presents, snowballing and so on. Observation of details and use of present tense combine to create some sense of involvement, though the present tense lapses occasionally, for example during the snowball fight. Moments of humour, for example ‘I take a step back to admire my masterpiece’ and sadder thoughts about the passage of time such as ‘These days gran isn’t as quick and nimble on her feet’, convey an adequate impression of the writer’s personality.

## Overall

The piece is placed in the 9-7 range. The candidate explores feelings and experiences with an adequate sense of involvement and reflection, using memories from childhood to comment on how, though things may change, the meaning of Christmas remains. As the essay is fully described by the 9-7 range, it was awarded **8 marks**.

## Candidate 3

The candidate was awarded **11 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing: **Lessons on guitar, experiences for life.**

### Summary

This is a broadly creative essay in the form of a personal/reflective essay about the positive impact of playing the guitar. The candidate's comments range from the early excitement and frustration of learning to play to the thrill of performing, and there is reflection on the power of music and love of playing to help during difficult times.

### Content

The piece shows clear attention to purpose from the start, opening with the statement, 'From an early age, I have always been surrounded by music.' The candidate lists examples of musical sounds which have accompanied family life so far, following these with examples of musical instrument sounds: 'thundering kick of a drum. The low rumble of a bass guitar...the mellow and relaxing notes of a saxophone'. The discussion reaches a climax with the introduction of the subject of the essay: '...one instrument that really grabbed my attention much more easily than the others, and that was the guitar'.

The second paragraph again begins with a clear, emphatic statement: 'A guitar is one of those instruments that simply can't be ignored'. The candidate's enthusiasm is conveyed clearly and there is an obvious sense of involvement in the description of being captivated by guitar music. This is shown in creative use of description, creating a clear sense of wonder, for example, 'Whenever I heard a punchy, in-your-face riff', 'transported to another place entirely' and 'colossal impact on me'. The paragraph ends with another dramatic flourish: 'So by that point I was committed. I knew I wanted to learn the guitar'.

The essay goes on to describe the experience of learning to play, beginning with one word, 'Frustrated'. The candidate contrasts the early optimism of 'being so convinced that I could simply pick up a guitar and be able to play whatever I wanted' with the realisation that 'you have to start from scratch'. The youth of the candidate when starting out is emphasized by the difficulty of 'having to stretch my fingers' to make chord shapes. This exploration of the experience creates a clear sense of involvement; there is also self-awareness in comments on the 'infamous song' which the candidate 'tirelessly tried to perfect', to the torment of the family. Despite these excruciating early stages, the candidate maintains that the excitement of playing and the value of learning still endure: 'that electricity that always seems to flow through me when I pick up a guitar has never really left me'.

There follows a long paragraph which focuses on the progression from playing alone to performing. The candidate shows clear self-awareness in comments about the perspective of 'my 11 year old self' and there is evidence of clear involvement in the description of the 'countless hours of sitting in my bedroom plucking and strumming away' against the 'muffled shout of my mum' which 'was

all leading up to this moment'. The candidate shows insight when describing the 'battle' between nerves and excitement: 'It seemed my excitement had ultimately won the battle'. The 'battle' image is continued in the account of a band performance: 'the crowd was that of a Roman colosseum... I felt like a Gladiator'. The candidate shows self-awareness in the realisation of the positive impact of performing: 'it's helped me to grow as a person'.

The final paragraph summarises the benefits of playing guitar and the power of music, with the candidate highlighting the importance of playing as a comfort and support in challenging times. The candidate concludes by returning to the first guitar lesson, which 'wasn't just the start of me learning an instrument' and ends on a flourish: 'Music opened up a new world for me in so many ways'.

## Style

In terms of style, the candidate uses a range of linguistic features to create impact, expression is clear and there is clear structure which enhances meaning. Sentences are fluent and clearly constructed, for example the 'or' list in paragraph one and the minor sentences that follow: 'The thundering kick ...saxophone'. Longer and shorter sentences are combined to create impact, for example when contrasting the naïve expectations and more mature reflection in paragraph three: 'Frustrated. That's how I felt...no matter how difficult'.

The structure of the piece enhances meaning by charting the candidate's journey as a musician, a journey which we learn is not just about music, but also self-discovery. Throughout, language is used to create impact, for example, 'not for one second did I let this dishearten me' and 'quite daunting, to say the least'. Throughout, we gain a clear sense of the writer's self-deprecating and enthusiastic personality.

## Overall

This piece was placed in the 12-10 mark range. Ideas, feelings and experiences are explored with a clear sense of reflection and insight and the writing conveys a clear sense of personality. The piece is described fully by the statements in the 12-10 mark range and was awarded **11 marks**.

## Candidate 4

The candidate was awarded **10 marks** for this broadly creative piece of writing: **Happiness is Egg Shaped.**

### Summary

This is a broadly creative piece in the form of a personal/reflective essay on the candidate's experiences of playing, and then losing the ability to play, rugby. The essay describes their early excitement when learning to play at their first club, the accident that cost them their dream and the enduring power of the game to inspire, now as a supporter of the national team.

### Content

The opening paragraph establishes a humorous tone and a clear sense of the writer's personality, through the idea of a Martian's view of rugby. This device enables the candidate comically to raise questions which a human new to the game might ask, for example, 'Why do they go backwards to go forwards?' and to introduce the serious, central theme of the essay: 'why I love rugby'.

The essay then focuses on a specific event, the candidate's first experience of joining a team. There is a clear sense of involvement and of the writer's personality throughout this section. The reader is plunged into the 'sheer happiness and sense of belonging' on the way home from the first training session, and we then go back over the memories 'still engrained in my mind like initials carved on a tree'. Descriptive details evoke an atmosphere of excitement, for example, 'The lights were glaring, the grass was glimmering and it was a crisp dark winter's night'. The anticipation builds with 'laughter and sporadic shouts' and a 'mass of red and black strips swarming round the pitch'. The candidate continues to explore their feelings and reactions, which helps create a sense of involvement: 'I could feel eyes locking onto me, staring me down', 'I started to question why I had come' and 'I was hurtled backwards onto the clammy ground'. The tackle, rather than deterring, encourages the candidate, as they comment: 'from that moment I knew this was my sport'.

The piece goes on to comment adequately on their longer-term enthusiasm for rugby and the years of involvement, leading up to the injury that ended their career as a player. The candidate explores this devastating experience through a sequence of moments which clearly chart the accident and their awareness that they would not play again: 'Everything was going so well until the day of the accident...', 'It wasn't even rugby related, that's the most frustrating part', 'One thought went through my head when the sudden realisation hit me that I had dislocated my shoulder' and 'I was right'. There is a clear sense of self-awareness which continues in the description of their new role in the team: 'they call me the water boy but that's ok because they are my mates and the teasing makes it more bearable'.

There is a slightly abrupt shift of focus to the experience of spectating at an international match. The description creates a clear sense of involvement, 'roaring crowd falls silent...pipes blast into action', although there is some more

adequate description of feelings, 'it puts a smile upon my face and many others in the hope that your home team will come out on top'. Some of the reflection here is adequate rather than clear: 'Sometimes they win sometimes they lose but on the odd occasion that they are victorious it's a special memory that stays with you for a lifetime'.

The piece concludes by returning to the Martian motif as the candidate references the title and comments humorously on the probable reaction of a Martian to rugby: 'an ovate ball adds to the excitement due to its unpredictability...they'd come to the realisation that they have experienced the best sport in the world, or even the universe'.

## Style

In terms of style, the piece demonstrates linguistic features which create impact, mostly clear expression and clear structure which enhances meaning. The focus on feelings and reactions enables the candidate to explore experiences such as the first training session and the accident with a clear sense of involvement and personality. The use of features such as descriptive language and present tense, for example in building up the tension in the international match, combine to create impact. In places, the description and reflection seem more adequate than clear.

The structural device of framing the memories with comments on how a Martian would view the game provides a humorous opening and conclusion, while the main body of the essay clearly charts the candidate's experiences with rugby. The move from personal experience to describing an international match is a little abrupt.

## Overall

The piece is placed in 12-10 range. For the most part, feelings and experiences are explored with a clear sense of involvement and the writer's enthusiasm and wit come across clearly, through most of the piece. Due to the occasional movement into adequate range rather than clear, it was awarded **10 marks**.