

CONFIDENTIAL

Oxford University Press

HKDSE 2015 observations

Contents

Paper 1	3
Paper 2	19
Paper 3	24

Paper 1

Part A

- Two reading passages in Part A: that's the first time in HKDSE Paper 1 exam.
- 31 questions (Text 1: 24; Text 2: 7)
- 40 marks (Text 1: 31; Text 2: 9)
- Word count: 1022 words (Text 1: 729; Text 2: 293)

Reading passage: Text 1—In from the cold among warm-hearted Koreans

- This is an adapted version of an article in the *SCMP*
(<http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1448556/books-qa-daniel-tudor-aut-hor-geek-korea>)
- Text 1 is really quite difficult for Part A, but candidates should be familiar with this text type: interview transcript. The interview structure might make it more readable and is also easy to search through when answering questions.
- Due to rising interest in Korean entertainment culture in recent years, candidates are likely to approach the texts with some degree of interest, especially paragraphs 7 and 8.
- A few Korean terms are introduced in paragraph 4. This paragraph is particularly challenging to get to grips with as the Korean words relate to culture and national character archetypes. Candidates may be confused by the ideas and it may require a second or third read to understand.
- Advanced vocabulary used: *stoicism, inscrutable, raucous*

Reading passage: Text 2—Tudor's Book Covers Implausible, Impossible Korea

- This is an adapted version of an article in the *Wall Street Journal*
(<http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2012/10/15/tudors-book-covers-implausible-impossible-korea/>)
- This seems a somewhat unlikely choice for the exam: there is not really a whole lot of content in the review.

- The text itself is not too challenging but the questions that accompany it are surprisingly challenging for Part A.
- There is an unequal question distribution between the two texts: Text 2 has 41% of the word count of Text 1 but only 29% of the marks.

Comprehension section: question types

- There are no thematic questions and only two vocabulary questions in Part A.
- No single question in Part A can be categorized as a straightforward specific factual question or even basic inference question. They all require some degree of inference, which makes this year's Part A definitely more difficult than last year's. (This year's Part A is completely the reverse of last year's, which had a very high ratio of specific factual questions.)
- The reference questions this year are all more challenging than last year's (Q4, Q12, Q24).
- Last year, there were a few rather tricky questions, requiring 'higher-order thinking' skills, towards the end of Part A. But this year, this kind of question is introduced as early as in Q7.

Comprehension section: question formats

- There are no new question formats in Part A this year.
- It is noteworthy that opened-ended questions that require a short or an extended response make up the majority of the questions in Part A this year.
- There are far fewer multiple choice questions this year, which also makes the paper overall more challenging than last year.

Noteworthy questions:

- Q4: Very tricky reference question—'they' here refers directly to 'nobody else' but that clearly isn't an acceptable answer. Candidates need to understand that what Daniel is really talking about is 'other writers'. Also, the direct speech in the preceding line is in the present continuous tense whereas the question that includes the reference word is in the past tense—this makes it even tougher for candidates who don't immediately get the reference and have to try to work out the answer linguistically.

- Q10: very challenging. Paragraph 5 discusses how Westerners view Koreans and how the author believes Koreans veer away from this stereotype, without drawing on similarities or differences between the two. To get this answer, candidates are required to consider the passage as a whole and take into account the fact that the author left what he felt to be 'cold' Britain for 'warm' Korea, implying he sees Koreans to be more expressive and open with their feelings than Westerners. Picking up on the similarity between Westerners and Koreans is even trickier as candidates will have to infer that Westerners are also stereotyped as stoic and self-controlled, although the author only explicitly states that this is a stereotype of Koreans. This will stump many candidates who will be unable to infer the answers from paragraph 5 alone.
- Q19: 'materially' isn't a terribly difficult word, but it's very difficult to define in this context.
- Q23: This question could pose problems for weaker candidates who are unable to grasp the meaning of the text as a whole. They may take away an unintended and over simplistic meaning from the phrase 'In from the cold', such as Britain is a cold place to live (weather-wise).
- Q25: There is no 'irony' or 'ironically' in the text to signal the answer—candidates have to work it out for themselves. Even if they are familiar with the concept of irony, they may struggle to identify the example provided in the text.
- Q27: another very challenging question, which proves that this year's Part A is actually harder than last year's B2!
- Q29: this question may cause some candidates to fall into a trap. Michael Breen is only mentioned in paragraph 2 and therefore many candidates may look to this paragraph for the answer. However, paragraph 2 only outlines the similarities between Tudor and Breen's books. To find the differences, candidates need to look to paragraph 4 and understand the use of the phrase 'pushes into new social and economic territory'.
- Q30: no other description of the Korean view of success is provided in the review except for the word 'tunnel-like'. Candidates are expected to infer the answer, which requires higher-order thinking skills.

Part B1

- Two reading passages
- 24 questions (Text 3: 10; Text 4: 14)
- 40 marks (Text 3: 15; Text 4: 25)
- Word count: 914 words (Text 3: 225; Text 4: 689)

Reading passage: Text 3—Witness Statement

- This is a sample witness statement, taken from an Australian website which provides legal advice
(http://www.lawassist.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au/lawassist/lawassist_sample_witness_statements_1_car_accidents.html)
- It is a rather straightforward narrative, at roughly the same difficulty level as the first text in last year's B1. There are none of the potentially confusing tense changes of last year's text, though—this is a straight-up past tense affair.
- The content and language in Text 3 are fairly easy to understand and should not pose significant problems for most candidates, but they need to be logical to follow how the accident happened and the positions of the cars.

Reading passage: Text 4—Will cars with no drivers catch on?

- This is an adapted version of an article in the *Washington Post*
(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/10/23/heres-what-it-would-take-for-self-driving-cars-to-catch-on/>)
- Text 4 is noticeably harder than the second text last year (which was noticeably harder than the first one).
- While Text 4 has a fair amount of signposting, its language, frequent (and potentially confusing) use of figures and futuristic nature together make it rather difficult to visualize and process the information.
- The paragraphs in Text 4 are less chunky than those of last year's B1 reading passages. The structure might make it less intimidating to less able candidates.
- American English is used in Text 4.

Comprehension section: question types

- Part B1 makes for a very different mark distribution than that of Part A: Text 3 has just 33% of the word count of Text 4 but 60% of the marks. Weaker candidates could possibly simply ignore Text 4 and still score a passing level.
- There are only two vocabulary questions in Part B1 (Q34, Q55).
- Some straightforward specific factual questions can be seen in Part B1.
- Q35 requires candidates to label the cars in the diagram. This question should cause candidates no problems as long as they understand prepositions.
- There is a views justification question in Part B1 as this has not been seen before (Q39).
- Q51 can be classified as a figurative language question and is quite tricky.
- This year's Part B1 is much harder overall than last year's. It seems doubtful this is intentional.

Comprehension section: question formats

- There are six multiple choice questions, the same as last year.
- The main idea question (Q49) that asks candidates to match the paragraph number with the main point adopts a slightly different format.

Noteworthy questions

- Q33: Strange phrasing—the witness's home address is hardly inherently 'important', but it's doubtful that candidates are required to expand on their answer along the lines of 'the police need to know where to get hold of the witness'; similar case for Q41.
- Q40: Candidates may not be familiar with legal documents. They'll probably work out the answer by eliminating the incorrect options.
- Q45: The 'who' in this question might throw candidates—they'll probably look for a specific person rather than a company.
- Q48 i): It's of course true that there are more than 30,000 car crashes in the US if there are more than 30,000 deaths (as the majority of car crashes are non-fatal), but the text doesn't explicitly say so. If this is indeed 'NG', candidates who apply a bit of common sense here will actually be penalized.

- Q48 ii): This is true in paragraphs 5 and 6, but paragraph 15 actually says that these cars would likely be *less* safe initially.
- Q54 could be the most challenging question in Part B1. It is very confusing phrased indeed. No clear reason is provided in the text for why it is better for a vehicle to be controlled by a person rather than a computer in complicated situations. The wording of the question is misleading as it asks ‘when’ and then asks for ‘a reason from the text’. Surely to provide a reason, the question would have to ask ‘why’.

Part B2

- One text, but with two accompanying comments
- 22 questions
- 40 marks
- Word count: 1052 words (Text 5: 997; Comments: 117)

Reading passage: Text 5—Young Minds in Critical Condition

- This is lifted from an article in ‘The Opinion Pages’ of *The New York Times* (http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/10/young-minds-in-critical-condition/?_r=1)
- The second comment (Laura’s) is also taken from *The New York Times*, but the first comment cannot be found on the NYT website, and it is doubtful it is authentic as it doesn’t fit the tone of the other comments. Also, ‘Tom’ seems to be responding to another comment rather than the opinion piece itself, as the author isn’t debating the merits of a liberal education versus a scientific one, but rather talking about how liberal education can be improved.
- This is clearly the hardest of the five texts, both linguistically and thematically.
- The topic is likely to be highly foreign to most candidates. Candidates are unlikely to have read about the study of liberal arts in any depth, partly because it is not a popular university subject in Hong Kong. The level of critical analysis done at university level may also be unfamiliar to many candidates.
- The text opens with little indication of what is to come in the following paragraphs. Candidates will need to read to the third or fourth paragraph before getting a full picture of what the passage is about.

- American spelling is used throughout, a given seeing as it is taken from *The New York Times*.
- Advanced vocabulary used: *triumphantly, depraved, cynicism, gruel, upmanship, debunkers, orowess, exuberant, undermine, fetishizing, fractured, receptive, pander*, and many more

Comprehension section: question types

- There are no questions that can be labelled ‘higher-order thinking’ in Part B2.
- There are fewer reference questions than in previous years.
- In past exams, questions about the title have involved explaining the title or choosing an alternative title (in MCQ format). Questions asking about the implied meaning in the title are new in this year’s exam.
- Q76 is a view justification question worth 4 marks.

Comprehension section: question formats

- Q59: a new question format for matching ideas to people in the text.
- Perhaps candidates will be grateful that they have been given options to choose from for Q61. If candidates can grasp the main idea of the text and understand some difficult vocabulary, this question is manageable.
- Q64: This is the first proofreading question since the days of the HKCEE. It requires a great deal of skill with the English language and a good level of understanding. Candidates need to correct the mistakes in a summary of paragraph 8.
- Q73: This is the first time ‘Ticking the correct options’ has appeared in Part B2.
- There are far fewer short-response formats and a higher number of extended response questions compared to last year, making this year’s part B2 more challenging.

Noteworthy questions

- Q57i: Candidates may have to look to the footnote to realize that Rousseau was a philosopher. Then, in order to answer the question correctly, they will need to possess the knowledge that philosophers tend to reflect on things and thus Rousseau’s comment that ‘the man who reflects is a depraved animal’ undermines

his own profession. It would also be helpful if candidates understand the metaphor ‘depraved animal’ and are aware of the negative connotations of the word ‘depraved’.

- Q59 requires a lot of thinking and good inference skills, especially since Michael Roth is the only person ‘speaking’ in paragraph 2 and therefore it could be argued that all of the quotations came out of his mouth. Candidates are required to appreciate that the idea has to be matched to the person who had the idea. Candidates will have to refer to both paragraphs 1 and 2 to decipher the answer. Based on paragraph 1, candidates need to equate Ralph Waldo Emerson’s idea about ‘self-reliance’ to the question Roth poses in paragraph 2 (Question B). Candidates are expected to understand that Question C is both an idea and a question posed by Michael Roth.
- Q62ii: This could be argued to be ‘T’, ‘F’ or ‘NG’. In the text it says ‘we may be depriving candidates of the chance to learn as much as possible’; therefore, the answer is most likely true. However, the phrasing of the question implies a greater level of certainty than the language used by the author. Therefore, it could be argued that the answer is false. This question is as clear as mud and really depends on the interpretation of the language used.
- Q62iii: The problems with this statement hinge on the meaning of ‘enjoy’ that candidates are supposed to infer. If ‘enjoy’ is taken in the very literal sense, i.e. ‘to derive pleasure’, the answer is presumably ‘NG’, since paragraphs 5 and 6 do not specify whether students derive pleasure from books, music and experiments in the classroom. If ‘enjoy’ is used in the broader sense, e.g. ‘to enjoy an advantage’, then the statement could be interpreted as referring to ‘find and create meaning and direction from the books, music and experiments in the classroom.’ This makes it impossible to categorize as ‘T’, ‘F’ or ‘NG’—the author says that this *may* be the case under the conditions he’s describing, or at least become the case, but that doesn’t make it categorically true.
- Q64’s wording could lead to candidates missing out on a mark: it states that there are three mistakes in the task, but then adds that ‘The first has been done for you.’ Candidates may therefore think that they only need to find two mistakes.
- Q68i is a bit of a trick question, especially if candidates don’t read the question properly. Many may mistakenly read ‘Why does Michael Roth ask them to put away their phones and tablets?’ When, in fact, the question asks ‘Why do the students think Michael Roth asks them to put away their phones and tablets?’

- Q71: The way this is phrased suggests that the question writer didn't understand the point the author is making—that this may be a tempting way to look at things, but ultimately unbeneficial.
- Q77 asks 'Does Laura agree with Roth?' Laura's comment is fairly cryptic but perhaps candidates can pick up the marks if they give a substantial enough reason for their decision. For example, candidates could argue that Laura does not agree with Roth as she favours practical endeavours, such as the design and building of structures rather than a philosophical musing on life. Thinking more abstractly, as is probably expected, candidates could argue Laura does agree with Roth because by suggesting destroying a structure takes little effort she is revealing her opinion that critically attacking someone's argument takes far less effort than building up an original idea from nothing.

Statistics

Reading passages word counts

HKDSE	Part A	Part B1	Part B2
2012	994	888	1103
2013	1088	818	1090
2014	956	894	1105
Average	1013	867	1114
2015	1022 (729 + 293)	914 (225 + 689)	1114 (997 + 117)

No. of questions/marks

HKDSE	Part A		Part B1		Part B2	
	Q	M	Q	M	Q	M
2012	20	47	20	45	33	46
2013	25	41	20	41	20	41
2014	30	47	29	41	25	41
Average	25	45	23	42	26	43
2015	31	40	24	40	22	40

Question types used in Part A

Question type	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q23	1	-	1	1
Main idea	Q10, Q17, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q25, Q29	7	1	2	3
Specific factual	Q2, Q6	2	13	9	7
Specific/Inference	Q9	1	-	5	-
Vocabulary	Q19, Q27	2	-	1	2
Reference	Q4, Q8, Q12, Q24	4	4	1	1
Inference	Q1, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q26, Q28	6	10	3	5
Figurative language	Q5, Q7	2	-	1	-
Views justification	Q11, Q16, Q18	3	-	-	1
Sequencing	Q3	1	1	1	-
Higher-order thinking	Q30, Q31	2	1	-	-

Question formats used in Part A

Question format	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q5	1	6	7	6
Short response	Q1, Q2, Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q15, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q24, Q26, Q27	17	13	7	6
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	-	-	1	-	-
T/F/NG	Q14	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	-	-	1	1	1
Cloze summary	Q17	1	-	2	1
Extended response	Q7, Q9, Q16, Q18, Q23, Q25, Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31	10	6	4	3
Matching sentences to speakers	-	-	1	-	1
Ordering events	Q3	1	1	1	-
Table completion	-	-	-	-	1
Sentence completion	-	-	1	-	-

Question types used in Part B1

Question type	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q40	1	1	-	1
Main idea	Q44, Q47, Q49, Q53, Q54	5	-	1	3
Specific factual	Q35, Q36, Q38, Q42, Q45, Q46, Q48, Q50	8	15	12	6
Specific/Inference	Q33, Q41	2	2	1	1
Vocabulary	Q34, Q55	2	4	1	2
Reference	Q43	1	2	2	2
Inference	Q32, Q37, Q52	3	4	3	4
Figurative language	Q51	1	-	-	-
Views justification	Q39	1	-	-	-
Sequencing	-	-	1	-	1
Higher-order thinking	-	-	-	-	-

Question formats used in Part B1

Question format	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q38, Q40, Q47, Q51, Q52, Q55	6	5	2	5
Short response	Q32, Q33, Q34, Q36, Q37, Q41, Q42, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q46, Q50, Q53	13	13	6	4
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	Q49	1	-	-	1
T/F/NG	Q48	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	Q35	1	1	-	-
Cloze summary	-	-	-	1	1
Extended response	Q39, Q54	2	5	4	1
Matching sentences to speakers	-	-	-	1	1
Ordering events	-	-	1	-	2
Sentence completion	-	-	1	-	1
Ticking boxes/blackening circles	-	-	1	3	1
Single/multiple blank	-	-	-	1	2
Table completion	-	-	-	-	-

Question types used in Part B2

Question type	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q74, Q75	2	-	-	-
Main idea	Q59, Q61, Q63, Q66, Q69, Q71	6	2	4	6
Specific factual	Q64	1	7	5	3
Specific/Inference	-	-	1	2	1
Vocabulary	Q58, Q65, Q72	3	1	1	6
Reference	Q60	1	5	2	3
Inference	Q56, Q57, Q62, Q67, Q68, Q73	6	7	2	8
Figurative language	Q70	1	3	1	1
Views justification	Q76, Q77	2	-	-	1
Sequencing	-	-	-	1	1
Higher-order thinking	-	-	-	2	3

Question formats used in Part B2

Question format	Question number	Total	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q56, Q63, Q65, Q69, Q75	5	5	4	9
Short response	Q58, Q60, Q67, Q68, Q70, Q71, Q72	7	13	4	11
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	-	-	1	-	-
T/F/NG	Q62	1	-	1	1
Labelling pictures	-	-	-	-	-
Cloze summary	Q61	1	1	2	1
Extended response	Q57, Q66, Q74, Q76, Q77	5	4	7	9
Matching sentences to speakers/person in the text	Q59	1	-	1	-
Sentence completion	-	-	1	-	-
Ticking boxes/blackening circles	Q73	1	-	-	-
Proofreading	Q64	1	-	-	-
Single/multiple blank	-	-	-	-	1
Ordering events	-	-	-	-	1
Timeline completion	-	-	1	-	-
Table completion	-	-	-	-	-

Paper 2

Part A

Question 1

Letter to the editor (formal)

- A letter to the editor is one of the tougher text types for students to master, but the job is made easier by a familiar context (school life) and the fact that the formal greeting and closing have been provided.
- The inclusion of the greeting and closing for the letter is a surprising development. In the writing descriptors, a key criterion under 'Organization' is that the structure be appropriate to the genre and text type. The greeting and closing would be key elements to include in order to test candidates' letter writing skills.
- Overall, this should be rather an easy task for most candidates. The topic should be familiar to most of them and they should be able to draw on personal experience and actual personal opinions for their answers.
- With no photographs or illustrations in the rubric, and no headings in the answer sheet, this represents something of a return to the more straightforward question types used in the 2009 Sample and 2012 Practice Papers.

Part B

- The questions are noticeably longer than in last year's paper. Questions generally seem to go into more detail and include more specifics to be included in students' answers. Three questions (2, 8 and 9) have a second paragraph, giving the task instructions, following a first paragraph in which the scene is set.
- Several questions (2, 4, 5 and 8) specify a number of reasons/suggestions/activities which must be included in students' answers. Rather than making these questions more difficult, this could be seen as a move to make marks easier to achieve, by providing a structure which students can follow when writing their answers (i.e. introduction; one body paragraph per reason/suggestion/activity; conclusion). One question that presents itself, however: will students be penalized if they exceed the specified number of reasons/suggestions/activities?

- Just as in 2014, most of the questions require a formal or at least semi-formal response. This arguably benefits weaker candidates, who may be able to memorize stock formal/business phrases to slot into their answer.
- As in 2014's paper, the connection between the questions and the Electives they are supposedly testing is rather tenuous at times. Figures from previous exams suggest that candidates tend to answer questions that appeal to them, or that they feel are more 'worthy' or 'serious', rather than those related to an Elective they have studied. We can expect this trend to continue with 2015's candidates.
- 2014's Examination Report stressed the importance of reading the questions carefully and recommended 'underlining key words or phrases that need to feature in the response'. This year's questions could be seen as a greater test of students' ability to understand and act on instructions; however, the inclusion of more specifics this year could also be interpreted as the HKEAA giving candidates assistance in planning and structuring their answers.

Question 2: Sports Communication

Suggestion letter (problem-solution essay) (semi-formal)

- This question is possibly the least challenging in the paper. In addition to a familiar school setting, there is a lot of guidance for candidates. The structure of the suggestion letter is set out for students in a problem-solution-reason format, and the first part of the answer ('explaining why your classmates are unhappy about existing PE lessons') is provided in the rubric ('the lessons are not interesting').
- Candidates should have few difficulties thinking of two activities that could be included in the lessons, although explaining why these activities would be more popular with students may present more of a challenge to some candidates.

Question 3: Drama

Short story (informal)

- This question is unlikely to have been popular with candidates. The rather vague question requirements (a story about 'the elderly realizing their dreams'), coupled with an unfamiliar topic, would make for hard going. In addition to this, since previous Examination Reports have shown that attempting creative writing in the Paper 2 exam is risky at best, smarter candidates may well steer clear of this question.

- The link to the elective is particularly tenuous in this question: the topic of the short story has no connection to Drama, and although the rubric states that the story ‘will later be turned into a play’, this has no bearing on what candidates are being asked to write.

Question 4: Social Issues

Suggestion letter (formal)

- This is likely to have been a popular question with candidates. The Social Issues question was popular in the previous three years’ exams, and this year’s question, concerning schooling abroad, is both serious enough in tone and close enough to students’ own experience to provide a good platform for candidates to showcase their writing ability.
- Candidates are required to discuss the impact on local schools, which should be straightforward, and on students who go abroad, which may be more difficult for candidates if they lack sufficient knowledge of culture and school systems abroad.

Question 5: Debating

Letter to the editor (one-sided argumentative essay) (formal)

- The Debating question in the HKDSE exam is still yet to feature a debate speech, which would be the natural text type to use. This year’s question comes the closest of any so far, with a letter to the editor which asks students to argue either for or against setting aside land on Hong Kong’s harbour front for public use.
- The ‘for’ and ‘against’ sides of the debate effectively present candidates with a choice between arguing on familiar territory but with little scope for showing their writing ability, versus the potential for a more complex answer which carries the risk of candidates running out of ideas or getting out of their depth if they lack knowledge of how urban development works.

Question 6: Workplace Communication

Business email (formal)

- The Workplace Communication question was by far the most popular in 2013 and 2014, but this year’s question may have been less popular with candidates. The setting (working as an intern in a telecommunications customer services

department), requirements (describing a complaint and giving three possible solutions) and even the phrasing of the question are quite intimidating.

- Although the structure of the letter has essentially been provided for candidates, they must invent the customer complaint and provide all the solutions themselves. Strong candidates may thrive here, but those without much knowledge on the subject may struggle. Planning is also particularly important here: candidates should think of the complaint and all the possible courses of action before they start writing: candidates who fail to do this may write themselves into a corner.

Question 7: Popular Culture

Report (problem-solution essay) (formal)

- Here, students are asked to write a report, but the actual requirements of the task are closer to those of a problem-solution essay, with students asked to define a problem and list suggestions for solutions, backed up with reasons.
- This question is something of a gift for candidates who are familiar with recent developments in cinema. The question's central premise—that cinema attendance is declining—is actually false, due in part to cinema chains implementing just the type of audience-attracting measures candidates will be expected to provide.

Question 8: Poems and Songs

Suggestion letter (formal)

- Much like the Drama question, this has very tenuous link to the Elective. Although it is unlikely that the question will ever require students to write an actual poem or song, in previous years, candidates have at least been required to write about poems or songs. Here, candidates take on the identity of the chairperson of the Poetry Club, but this is the only nod to the Elective: the suggestions for activities that they must provide are required to 'enhance students' interest in learning English', but they need not be related to poems or songs in any way.
- The structure of this question is quite similar to that of the Sports Communication question: candidates are given an informal 'structure' of two suggestions, which they must back up with reasons.

Question 9: Short Stories

Suggestion email (semi-formal)

- Another question with a rather dubious link to its Elective. In a break from the previous years' exams, candidates do not have to write a short story, but an email, in which candidates are asked to recommend an author to appear at an event. Similar to the Poems and Songs question, while candidates must explain why they have chosen the author and suggest activities that will 'promote students' interest in reading', there is no need for them to mention anything specifically related to short stories.
- Like the Sports Communication and Poems and Songs questions, this question requires students to provide suggestions which they must support with reasons. This question is a little more difficult, since candidates are not given such a clear structure (i.e. introduction; one body paragraph per suggestion; conclusion) and are required to suggest activities for their chosen author to be involved in, in addition to justifying their choice.

Paper 3

Part A

4 tasks, 58 marks in total (very close to the average)

2012	53
2013	58
2014	60
2015	58
Average	57.25

- Nothing very surprising. The overall format and structure are very similar to past papers.
- The Part A situation does not assign a specific role to candidates (like 2012 and 2014's Part A, unlike 2013's Part A).
- All four tasks are two-page tasks (although the total number of questions and marks remain similar to previous years' papers).
- Task formats include the familiar meeting/interview note sheet and tables. There are no flow charts or diagrams in this year's P3 exam.
- For the first time, a task is subdivided into two further parts (Task 2).
- Tasks 1 and 4 have examples, Tasks 2 and 3 do not. (2014: Task 1; 2013: Tasks 1, 3, 4).
- Progression in level of difficulty from Task 1 through 4 is quite pronounced this year, especially in the amount of writing candidates have to do.
- The recording speeds of Tasks 1 and 2 are relatively slow and these recordings include a lot of repetition, as we'd expect. Then there's a big step up for T3 and T4.
- There seems to be an intentional effort to include a variety of accents this year.

Task 1

17 marks

2012	13
2013	14
2014	12
2015	17
Average	14

Format: 'Meeting notes' (gap-fill/sentence completion/ticking boxes)

Listening for numbers

Listening for times and dates

Listening for place names

Listening for web addresses

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for changes and self-corrections

Listening for descriptions of pictures

Listening for opinions

- 17 marks is a lot more than for the earlier years' Task 1. The HKEAA seem to have jettisoned last year's progression in the marks: this year, the highest-scoring task is Task 1 and the lowest-scoring is Task 4. Is this to make a higher ratio of the total marks attainable for weaker candidates?
- This is longer than last year's Task 1 (two pages instead of one). This is the first time there have been two pages for task 1.
- Still, this is clearly the easiest of the four tasks. The recording speed is slow and the enunciation clear, and the answers are spoken in the order they appear in the note sheet.
- There are also a lot of repetitions, even for the very easy answers, e.g. *night to remember, 24th November*.
- The speakers often use the same words as in the Question-Answer Book, e.g. *Between the ages of ..., belong to a school group or ..., a link or an icon in the shape of* This of course makes it easier for candidates to fill in the blanks.
- Signal words are often used in the recording to indicate the content points, e.g. *How do they apply?, first ... second ..., Thirdly*.
- The answers for Q5–Q7 come more quickly, and there are no repetitions for these

questions.

- This is the first time candidates have had to listen to a description of a poster design and identify the correct poster.
- Q4: *interval* is quite a tricky word, and it is not spelt out.
- Candidates may also struggle to spell some other words, e.g. *theatre*, *trolley* and *independent*, none of which are spelt out in the recording.
- The email address and telephone number are repeated in the recording and, oddly, *org* is spelt out. This is actually the only word that is spelt out in this year's entire Paper 3 exam.
- Q10: 'the video should contain a video of ...'—this could be confusing.
- Q11 does not stand out as an answer and may be easy to miss.
- Q17: candidates have to listen out for the correction here: they initially say *red* but the answer should be *white*. Quite easy to catch though.

Task 2

14 marks

2012	13
2013	13
2014	15
2015	14
Average	13.75

Format: table completion (gap-fill/sentence completion, giving reasons which are explicitly stated)

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for positive and negative information

Listening for comparisons and preferences

Evaluating information

Listening for main ideas and supporting points

- The number of marks for this task is more in line with previous years, and very close to the average.
- This task is split into two parts, Part A and Part B, which is a slightly new approach. Many previous tasks have had two distinct sections to them (as do Tasks 3 and 4 this

year), but we haven't seen this sort of explicit split before, with a separate rubric for the second part.

- The vast majority of marks are for Part A, though: 10 out of the total 14.
- In Part A, all the answers are spoken in the order in which they appear in the table.
- In Part B, however, candidates need to take down the reasons in Q29–31 before they tick the correct company in Q28. This will probably cause a lot of candidates to miss the marks for Q29–31.
- Candidates only need to write a few words at the most, but they may struggle to pick out the keywords as there is quite a lot of chatter around the answers.
- Unlike Task 1, the recording for Task 2 does not always use the same words as in the Question-Answer book, e.g. *Shouldn't have any mistakes* → Answer: No mistakes, *Like it's performed by a professional group* → Answer: Should sound professional
- The transition from one point to another is not as explicit as in Task 1; fewer signal words are used, e.g. from 'C. Popularity with audience' to 'D. Education value'
- Q19: It sounds like Nancy is disagreeing about 'sounding professional' being a criterion—possibly confusing to candidates.
- Q21 and Q22 do not stand out much as answers and may be easy to miss.

Task 3

16 marks

2012	14
2013	15
2014	15
2015	16
Average	14.75

Format: 'Meeting notes' (gap-fill/sentence completion)

Listening for keywords and information

Listening and completing a text

Summarizing information

- 16 marks is the highest we've seen so far for Task 3, but just by one mark. It's still quite close to the average.

- Two pages, like last year (one page in 2012 and 13), with two distinct sections. It's unclear why the HKEAA felt the need for the Part A/B split in Task 2 when there isn't one here.
- Much more difficult than Tasks 1–2 (in fact, one of the most difficult tasks in all the Paper 3 exams). The speed of the recording is faster than that of Task 2, and stuttering and laughing can be heard in the conversation. Also, the recording provides different ways of wording many of the answers, and candidates may have difficulty identifying the best phrasing. There is unnecessary repetition of body text, but almost no repetition of the answers.
- In the first section of the task, candidates often need to make tense changes for their answers. For example, in Q32, they need to change *sleeping in* to *slept in* (or to *overslept*, which isn't given at all in the recording); in Q36, they need to change *wakes them up* to *woke them up*; in Q40, they need to change *he's forgotten* to *forgot all the words* and in Q41, they need to change *falls into the swimming pool* to *fell into the swimming pool*.
- In Q35, candidates are likely to start writing **one of the judges**. This may cause them to miss the actual answer.
- In the second part of the task (page 9), there is a lot of writing required, especially for the 'Special feature to note' sections. Many candidates will probably struggle to write down the answers.
- Also, the candidates are given no guidance about the 'Special feature to note', which may panic some of them. It's likely to be unclear to them just how much they need to write for each answer.
- There is quite a long spiel about 'a cappella' (Q43 and 44) which may throw some candidates. Actually, it is not necessary for candidates to include this word in their answers, and there is an explanation as to its meaning.

Task 4

11 marks

2012	13
2013	16
2014	18
2015	11
Average	14.5

Format: Radio debate Question-Answer sheet

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for implied meanings

Listening for attitudes and opinions

Listening for main ideas and supporting points

Summarizing information

Listening for descriptions of cause and effect, problems and solutions

- The marks for Task 4 have been the most inconsistent over the years. Eleven marks is the least we've seen so far for this task, and well below the average.
- This format is something of a departure from previous years, and from the earlier tasks in this year's Paper 3 exam: the context has been dropped entirely, as candidates are given no reason for completing this Q-A sheet.
- These open-ended questions represent a new P3 format—no gap-filling or sentence completion is required here.
- Only 30 seconds of preparation time is given to candidates, compared with one minute of preparation time given to Task 4 in previous Paper 3 exams.
- Also quite fast-paced, though the recording is possibly slightly slower than Task 3's, and only one person is speaking at a time.
- The rubric says 'Please note that you do not need to answer in complete sentences.', but in actual fact, most of the questions do require complete, or close to complete, answers to be fully intelligible. Consequently, candidates have to do a lot of writing for this task. Also, in order not to miss any marks, candidates need to keep actively listening while they're noting down their answers—quite challenging.
- Still, many of the answers are given almost verbatim in the recording. Task 3 required more paraphrasing and tense changes.
- Q49 could be confusing as there are a few possible answers: (i) 'It is important for young people to develop a love for music', (ii) 'Pop music is the best place to start developing a love for music', (iii) 'Listening to pop music at least means young people are listening to something'. None of the options are really a clear reason as to why pop music is so important for young people.
- Very clear points about 'televised karaoke' (Q53 and 54).
- In Q58, the first consequence Wendy Craik mentions is 'it seems that everyone can do it'. Candidates who start writing down this answer are likely to miss what is

presumably the intended correct answer ('musicians give up when things get tough') even though this is signalled by 'the *consequence* of perpetuating this lie is ...'.

Part B: Recording

- The overall Part B format is similar to previous years' papers. Each task continues to carry 18 marks.
- The situation is thematically linked to the Part A tasks, and should be quite interesting to most candidates.
- Length of the recording: around 8 minutes (similar to last year's), but the word count is significantly lower than previous years' Part B: 895 words is well below the average of 1073 words.
- The speed is a little slower than last year's, and noticeably slower than the recordings for Tasks 3 and 4.
- There is less information to take down than last year, and a fair amount of repetition.
- When Starsky is being spoken to directly, the name is often mentioned first, so if candidates listen for this pointer, they know they are being spoken to and therefore the information is likely important.
- There's more of a complete split between Parts B1 and B2 in the recording and note-taking sheet this year: two subheadings are exclusively for B1 tasks and the other two exclusively for B2. There is no overlap whatsoever between the two sections.
- Subheading 1: All the information here is for the B1 tasks, and all the details candidates need to take down are repeated.
- Subheading 2: This is for B2, and the information here is a bit more advanced. Also, the final detail, about noise levels not being an issue (as the band will mime to a CD), is not repeated.
- Subheading 3: B1 again, so the information is very straightforward and everything is repeated. Not many details to take down for this subheading.
- Subheading 4: For B2. Much more info in this section of the recording, and less repetition. Also, the recording speed increases a bit as they start discussing possible souvenirs. There is a lot to write here, so the note-taking becomes progressively harder.

Part B1: Data File

- 11 items in the data file. This is more than in previous years (9 in 2013 and 2014 and 7 in 2012). This means more cross-referencing is required, which may potentially result in increased difficulty for candidates.
- The total word count of the B1 DF items is slightly lower than last year's, however.
- Most of the DF text types are quite familiar (emails, chats, letter, podcast transcript), although there are more visual items than previously, e.g. iTunes screenshot, most downloaded songs list, worst albums list.
- No headings are provided in the instructional text (DF2). Headings were only used in 2013.
- The items don't appear in the order candidates need to use them (same as previous years).

Task 5

18 marks

Complete a schedule using information from the Data File and the recording

- There are 16 content points this year, which leaves just 2 marks for language. Last year, there were an additional 2 marks for appropriacy, which was clearly excessive for what was essentially just a gap-fill exercise.
- As in previous years, Task 5 is the easiest of the Part B tasks, as often candidates can lift the relevant information directly from the DF.
- Completing the schedule is a fairly simple task as candidates can scan the DF texts for the times.
- The 'Special instructions for the performance' section is trickier. Presumably, these can be listed in any order—many candidates will probably lose marks otherwise.
- Ordering the songs: this is also simple enough. Candidates have to refer to their note-taking sheet and one DF item.

Task 6

18 marks

Write a short biography of Charlie Chiba using information from the Data File (120 words)

- This task is also quite straightforward, and only requires information from the Data File.
- Candidates are given clear guidance for this task in the initial instructional email and are directed to the DF items they need to use. They are provided with three clear points to work from and told how to structure their writing (this is different from last year and 2012, but the same as 2013).
- The suggested structure calls for the details about Chiba's life to be listed in chronological order. This may pose a challenge to candidates as this is not how the information is presented in the Data File.
- Also, there is quite a lot of cross-referencing required as candidates need to refer to four different DF items to complete the task. For example, they need to use the iTunes screenshot and the most downloaded songs list (UK, 2014) to comment on how Bubblegum's song 'Dance addiction' was the second most downloaded song in 2014. Candidates will also have to cross reference the podcast and the 'worst albums of 2012' to conclude that Charlie Chiba's solo album *Oh So Pretty* was voted the worst album in 2012 by *Buzz Online* listeners (although in the instructional email they are told to include 'negative things' too).
- The *Buzz Online* chart is rather confusing and difficult to read. The major info to take away from this, though, is that the album was voted the very worst, not necessarily by how many respondents.
- It's unclear whether information about Chiba's school is required in the answer. Possibly not, as the suggested word limit for the task is just 120 words.
- In the instructional email, candidates are reminded that they will be writing for an audience of teenage fans. Getting the tone right for this may be quite challenging for some candidates as many local students have a harder time with colloquial English than they do with more formal language.

Task 7

18 marks

Write an email replying to the pupils at St. Godfrey's Catholic School using information from the Data File and the recording (150 words)

- This task is fairly simple as well, as long as candidates remember to include all of the necessary details from the various DF items.
- Candidates are again directed to all of the sources they are required to use in the instructional email.
- Candidates are told to refer to their notes for this task, but the information given in the recording is mostly repeated in the Data File (no questions about love lives/family). Actually, the comment in the recording about interviews always having to take place in the band's hotel appears to be superfluous as candidates are given the venue for the interview in DF item 4. If candidates who leave out this 'rule' are penalized for it, it's very unfair indeed.
- The same goes for the dress code at the hotel: it really should be sufficient to say 'smart clothes', but it's possible that specifying 'no sandals' is an additional content point.

Part B2: Data File

- There are actually fewer DF items in B2 than in B1 this year (10), which hasn't been the case since the very first sample of the HKDSE back in 2009. And there are fewer items than in last year's B2 Data File (13).
- However, all of the items are very wordy (there are no visual sources), so B2 candidates will need to spend more time reading and processing the information than those tackling B1.
- The total word count of the B2 Data File (2,057 words) is almost 200 words higher than the previous maximum figure (1,872 in 2014).
- All the DF text types are quite familiar: emails, web pages, articles, chat transcript, transcript from UK news programme.
- There is no overlap whatsoever between B1 and B2 in terms of Data File items. The two Data Files are completely different.
- The instructional email is very short this time. Candidates are directed to specific DF items only for Task 8.

- As in the instructional email in the B1 Data File, no headings are provided.

Task 8

18 marks

Write an email to Ultimatum Products using information from the Data File and the recording (120 words)

- 120 words is the lowest word limit we've seen for a Task 8. Presumably this was shortened to allow for a higher limit for Task 9.
- Candidates are directed to the sources they need to use in the instructional email.
- Candidates are given the name of the recipient (Ms. Daniella Wong) in the answer sheet, but need to come up with an appropriate subject themselves.
- Are candidates expected to mention Daniella Wong's department (Products Department) in the email? That would be standard for a business *letter*, but it's not generally done in emails.
- If not, there is really no information of use in DF item 3. This information page does encourage customers to explain the type of event they're buying the products for, but this is only if they want advice on other possible products, which doesn't seem to be the case in this situation. Still, providing a brief explanation of the event will likely be a content point nevertheless.
- Candidates also need to remember to provide the amounts and basic design features for all the products (such as T-shirts in different colours, temporary tattoos, Hong Kong flags with 'Bubblegum' printed on them, etc.). So long as they cover all of the necessary information, this part should pose no problems.
- Are candidates expected to list both pandas and teddy bears, and if so, should there be 20,000 of each?
- The 'likes'/'dislikes' icons are quite a clever way of showing which products to go for.

Task 9

18 marks

Write an email to the manager at The Peak Sky Deck using information from the Data File and the recording (180 words)

- 180 words is the highest limit we've seen for Task 9 since 2012. Still, completing this task within the suggested word limit is almost impossible. There is a lot of content to cover and the formal nature of the email requires the use of a lot of polite stock phrases and cohesive devices. Simply listing the information would presumably result in lost marks in all three language areas (especially appropriacy).
- Also, candidates need to refer to a lot of DF items to complete this task. Some of them (such as the Skype transcript) are extremely colloquial, giving them a very different tone from that required in the email, so copying verbatim will not work.
- It's unclear just how much information needs to be included about the surveys in DF6. Presumably candidates are expected to mention that people recognize the most famous landmarks from music videos, but do they need to give figures and mention these landmarks by name? Tall order, given the limited word count.
- Do the 'lights with stands' need to be listed as a heavy item? The email specifically says to list 'individual items that weigh over 40 kg'.
- As in Task 8, the name of the recipient is given in the answer sheet but candidates need to provide a subject. This is a bit odd, as this text is supposed to be a response to a previous email (DF5), which doesn't have a subject.
- This task is definitely harder than task 8.

Task 10

18 marks

Write a short article using information from the Data File (200 words)

- In some ways a slightly flawed task, but probably not that difficult for most candidates. All the necessary info can be found in just two DF items, and there is no need to use any of the notes from the recording. Task 9 is actually quite a bit harder.

- A couple of the instructions in DF2 for this task are a bit confusing. First of all, the structure demanded by the instructional email doesn't really make sense for this article. It's more natural to deal with the false accusations at the same time as you're describing what really happened. The 'respond to what Gossip Magazine claims happened' bit is pretty much taken care of in the summary of what actually happened. Second, candidates are told not to 'quote directly', as they 'want this article to be factual, not "he said, she said"'—but the only 'summary of the incident' given in the DF is a completely uncorroborated statement by Mark Nelson, in his own (extremely colloquial) words. There simply isn't any 'factual' information anywhere in the data File.
- Getting the tone right for this text may be a bit tricky. It's an 'article' but it's written for the fan website of a pop band with teen supporters. Following the typical structure and tone of a newspaper article will obviously make the text inappropriate for the audience, so there needs to be quite a fine balance.
- It's quite clever to have the 'report' by Mark Nelson in excessively colloquial language—it means that candidates who copy verbatim for their articles will lose language marks for inappropriate tone. Though of course they'll still get the content points.
- Possibly, Malcolm's comments in the Skype chat that Mark is a 'good kid' and 'gentle as a lamb' may be a content point; otherwise, why they would include comments about the incident in this Data File item. If it is indeed a CP, it's rather unfair, as the task doesn't specifically ask for this information to be included in the article—and it would be a 'direct quote', which candidates are explicitly told not to include.

Statistics

Marks

	Part A					Part B1			Part B2		
	<i>Task 1</i>	<i>Task 2</i>	<i>Task 3</i>	<i>Task 4</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Task 5</i>	<i>Task 6</i>	<i>Task 7</i>	<i>Task 8</i>	<i>Task 9</i>	<i>Task 10</i>
2012	13	13	14	13	53	12	18	18	18	18	18
2013	14	13	15	16	58	18	18	18	18	18	18
2014	12	15	15	18	60	18	18	18	18	18	18
2015	17	14	16	11	58	18	18	18	18	18	18
Av	14	13.75	14.75	14.5	57.25	16.5	18	18	18	18	18

Content points in Tasks 6–7

	<i>Task 6</i>		<i>Task 7</i>		<i>Task 8</i>		<i>Task 9</i>		<i>Task 10</i>	
	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>Marks</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>
2012	9	12	9	15	9	15	9	13	9	14
2013	9	9	9	18	9	13	9	9	9	13
2014	9	9	9	10	9	15	9	11	9	10
2015	9	12*	9	10*	9	12*	9	16*	9	12*
Av	9	10.5*	9	13.25*	9	11.25*	9	12.25*	9	12.25*

TC = Task Completion, CPs = Content Points

*Estimate

Tapescript word count

	Part A				Part B	Total
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4		
2012	571	868	742	580	1079	3658
2013	822	1037	476	624	1213	4172
2014	815	612	922	984	1106	4439
2015	728	670	915	754	895	3962
Av	734	797	764	735	1073	4058

All figures are for just the tasks, without the 'Announcer' parts (rubrics and end of task announcements)

DF items/word count

	B1		B2	
	DF items	Word count	DF items	Word count
2012	7	1040	8	1738
2013	9	1224	10	1836
2014	9	1487	13	1872
2015	11	1410	10	2057
Av	9	1290	10.33	1876

Word limit for Part B tasks

	Part B1			Part B2		
	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8	Task 9	Task 10
2012	–	120	150	150	200	200
2013	–	120	150	150	120	200
2014	–	120	150	150	150	200
2015		120	150	120	180	200
Av	–	120	150	142	162	200