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HKDSE 2017 observations

Contents

Paper 1

Part A

- One longer reading passage in Part A (going back to the 2013 and 2014 format)
- 21 Questions (quite standard, compared to 18 Qs in 2016 and 31 [notably high] in 2015)
- 41 Marks
- Word Count: 1057 words

Reading passage: Text 1 The Myth of Recycling (text type: opinion piece, article)

- Source: Adapted from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/opinion/sunday/the-reign-of-recycling.html>
- Most of the original content has been kept.
- At more than 1000 words, candidates may find the length overwhelming (though the language level is not out of the ordinary for a Part A text).
- This is an opinion piece, using the second person to address the reader, rhetorical questions, quotes and an argumentative style.
- Candidates are likely to be familiar with the topic of recycling, but some of the technical vocabulary and statistics may cause problems for weaker candidates.

Comprehension section: question types

- Like last year, the majority of the questions here are specific factual, with some inference involved (Q13, 14, 17, 18).
- There is a clear progression of difficulty, with questions requiring more thought (such as higher-order thinking and main idea questions) towards the end of Part A.

Comprehension questions: question formats

- A fair amount of multiple choice questions.
- There are, however, more multiple response questions than last year (perhaps due to the number of marks for Part A remaining the same, but the number of questions going up).

Noteworthy questions

- Q1: This question format (of ticking pictures that do *not* appear in the text) has not been seen since HKDSE 2013.
- Q13: This question may be difficult because it requires inferencing to extract the correct percentages.
- Q16: Irony may be a difficult concept for weaker candidates (especially considering there is no mention of the word itself in the text).
- Q15: This question may potentially be tricky for weaker candidates, due to the paragraph in question (paragraph 14) featuring a lot of technical and topic-specific vocabulary.

- Q19: This format (two quote columns with the matching names underneath) has not been seen before in the HKDSE (although 2014 Q30 has a *slightly* similar layout).

Part B1

- Three texts (2 reading passages, as in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 exams, but with a small infographic)
- 22 Questions (Text 2: 10 questions; Text 3: 13 questions)
- 43 Marks (Text 2: 22 marks; Text 3: 21 marks)
- 768 Words (Text 2: 354 words; Text 3: 25 words; Text 4: 389 words)

Reading passage: Text 2 Millennials—Coming of Age (text type: presentation slides)

- Source: Adapted from <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/pages/millennials/>
- PowerPoint presentation slides are a new format, never seen before in the HKDSE. (The information/content in these slides—full sentences, only one image— is more appropriate for an article, however. This text could easily have been presented in another format and it would not have made a difference.)
- Language is fairly simple, although there are figurative expressions ('prime spending years')
- Candidates should be able to relate to the topic, since they are millennials themselves.

Reading passage: Text 3 *Who Are Millennials? (infographic)*

- Source: Adapted from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/understanding-generation-y-buying-power-egil-moller-nielsen>
- This is a small infographic (less than 30 words) with a few facts.
- It is odd to note that just one (specific factual) question (Q32) was dedicated to this text; this information could have been inserted into either of the texts as a simple sentence. This is similar to Paper 3, however, where we also saw an increase in images in the Data File. This could be EAA's attempt to increase the extent of multimodality and assess candidates' visual literacy.

Reading passage: Text 4 Do Millennials Have it Better or Worse? (text type: article)

- Source: Adapted from <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/millennials-might-be-smarter-richer-and-healthier-than-their-parents-but-they-have-it-worse-20782>
- The article has not been fully adapted; parts of it were copied verbatim from the original.
- This is a short article that most candidates should find interesting to read.
- Again, the language is not too difficult.

Comprehension section: question types

- The mark distribution of questions between both texts is more or less proportionate to their respective word counts.
- The question levels are appropriate for Part B1, the easier section.
- Mostly straightforward specific factual, although there are some that require further thinking.

- Again, the majority are specific factual and vocabulary questions.

Comprehension questions: question formats

- Only one True/ False/ Not Given and one Ticking boxes question
- Short responses dominate the Text 2 questions.

Noteworthy questions

- Generally straightforward (nothing that stands out particularly).
- Q33, asking candidates to match paragraph ideas to examples, has a slightly different format than what's been seen before.

Part B2

- One reading passage (once more, following the 2013, 2014 and 2015 exam)
- 15 Questions
- 43 Marks
- Word count: 1190 words

Reading passage: Text 4 MILLENNIALS—Themes in the Literature (Text type: academic research paper)

- Source: Adapted from this paper <http://millersville.edu/academics/gened/files/PDFs%20Faculty%20Handbook/2_Millenials%20Themes%20in%20Current%20Literature_Eubanks2006.pdf>
- The theme is still Millennials (thematic link to B1); candidates should be personally familiar with the topic. However, they may find this text dry and unfamiliar (since it is an academic paper/journal article that heavily cites and focuses on research).
- Academic citations/references have not been seen before in the HKDSE; this may amp up the difficulty, since candidates are unlikely to be familiar with citations *before* they have reached university level.
- A noticeably higher language level than Part B1 (complex sentences, many relative clauses, passive voice structures and advanced vocabulary).
- The critical analysis is also likely much deeper than what most candidates will be used to (a lot of references to sociohistorical factors, generational changes in familial relationships and cultural factors).
- This text is likely to be the most difficult B2 text since the 2015 paper (the 2015 B2 topic was on liberal education), which is also supported by the readability statistics on p.7.
- Except for the Introduction and Conclusion, there are missing subheadings similar to the 2012 Part B1 and 2016 Part A texts (except that they are labelled with roman numerals this time).
- Advanced vocabulary used: *conception, emergence, exuberant, foisted, ubiquitous, catalyst, overt*

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Comprehension section: question types

- There seems to be a few extended questions that straddle more than one skill at a time (for example: Q45, Q48 and Q52 include both Specific Factual and Inference questions).
- There are also several questions (Q48, Q49, Q51, Q52) that test students understanding of how the main ideas/points within a paragraph are interconnected and supported by examples.

Comprehension questions: question formats

- The most popular are the multiple choice (Q47, Q50, Q57), multiple short response (Q46, Q48, Q53) and table/diagram completion (Q49, Q51, Q52) formats.
- This section also has fairly some challenging table completion questions (Q49, Q52).

Noteworthy questions

- Q45: Even though this is the very first question in Part B2, there is a mix of specific factual and inference required (especially for statement iv), since the text does not explicitly state whether experts agree or disagree with the definition—just that there is one definition that differs to the text's definition.
- Q48: Similarly, the first part of this question is specific factual but the other sections also require some degree of inference to complete them.
- Q49: This is likely to be a difficult question for candidates, since it asks about the difference between the researchers' understanding of Millennials. Candidates will need to look for signal words such as 'on the other hand', 'in contrast' and 'clashes'.
- Q52: This question has never been seen before in the HKDSE (not just filling in a table, but with very loose parameters; e.g. no ticking boxes, no instructions on how many words to include).
- Q53: There is no line number indication on where to find this in the text (although Prensky is only mentioned in one paragraph, candidates may still have to search hard for the answer since 'metaphor' is not mentioned anywhere in the text, but 'analogy' is used instead).
- Q58: Since in-text citations are from university-level academics, it seems unfair to ask candidates to deconstruct their composition here (although it is possible to infer the answers from reading them closely and relating them to the text).
- Q59: This question is quite tricky, since candidates will have to first infer what the quotes are saying in relation to the text, and *then* apply that to the relevant researcher(s) in order to score the marks.
- Q60: The missing subheadings are used for this main idea question at the end, similar to 2012 Part B1 and 2016 Part A.

Statistics

Reading passages word counts

HKDSE	Part A	Part B1	Part B2
2012	994	888	1103 (194+909)
2013	1088	818 (412+406)	1090
2014	956	894 (378+516)	1105
2015	1022 (729+293)	914 (225+689)	1114 (997+117)
2016	988 (237+751)	881 (65+90+299+117+310)	1116 (380+444+292)
Average	1010	879	1106
2017	**1057**	**768 (354 + 25 + 389)**	**1190**

Readability statistics

HKDSE	Part A		Part B1		Part B2	
	Flesch Kincaid reading ease* (higher, easier)	Average grade level** (higher, harder)	Flesch Kincaid reading ease (higher, easier)	Average grade level (higher, harder)	Flesch Kincaid reading ease (higher, easier)	Average grade level (higher, harder)
2012	71		56.6		43.45	
2013	54.7	11.8	47.0 (49; 44.9)	12.2 (12.1;12.3)	47.6	12.8
2014	78.2 (80; 76.4)	6.08 (4.8; 7.36)	85.3	5.32	63.3	9.22
2015	72.4	7.26	58.9 (58.8; 59)	9.95 (9.8; 10.1)	66.7 (88.6; 44.7)	8.94 (4.58; 13.3)
2016	64.8	12.9	61.5 (49; 85.3; 65; 47.5; 57.1; 65.1)	9.8 (12,1; 5.32, 9.02, 12.7, 10.2, 9.52)	56.9 (58.7; 50.4; 61.5)	11.1 (11.1; 12.9; 9.26)
Average	69.9	8.8	59.8	9.96	55.744	10.451
2017	**51.5**	**11.36**	**70.65**	**7.99**	**38.4**	**14.22**

**The average grade level has been drawn from the averages of Flesch Kincaid Grade Level, Gunning Fog Score, SMOG Index, Coleman-Liau Index, Automated Readability Index

*Score (Flesch reading ease)	School level	Notes
100.00–90.00	5th grade	Very easy to read. Easily understood by the average 11-year-old student.
90.0–80.0	6th grade	Easy to read. Conversational English for consumers.
80.0–70.0	7th grade	Fairly easy to read.
70.0–60.0	8th & 9th grade	Plain English. Easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students.
60.0–50.0	10th to 12th grade	Fairly difficult to read.
50.0–30.0	College	Difficult to read.
30.0–0.0	College graduate	Very difficult to read. Best understood by university graduates.

[Source: Flesch, Rudolf. 'How to Write Plain English'. *University of Canterbury*. Retrieved 24 April 2017]

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
2015	31	40	24	40	22	40
2016	18	41	28	43	29	43
Average	25	43	24	42	26	42
2017	**21**	**41**	**22**	**43**	**15**	**43**

Question types used in Part A

Question type	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	--	--	--	1	--	1	1
Main idea	Q21	1	4	7	1	2	3
Specific factual	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q17, Q18	14	8	2	13	9	7
Vocabulary	Q6	1	--	2	--	1	2
Reference		--	1	4	4	1	1
Inference	Q9, Q19	1	3	7	10	8	5
Language usage	Q8	1	1	--	--	--	--
Higher-order thinking	Q16, Q20	2	--	2	1	--	--
Figurative language	Q9	1	--	2	--	1	--
Views justification	--	1	1	3	--	--	1
Sequencing		--	--	1	1	1	--

Question formats used in Part A

Question format	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q6, Q9, Q10, Q11(ii). Q12, Q21	6	5	1	6	7	6
Short response	Q2, Q5, **Q11(**i), Q17, Q18	5	2	17	13	7	6
Matching subheadings/ main points	--	--	2	--	1	--	--
T/F/NG	Q4	1	1	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	--	--	1	--	1	1	1
Cloze completion	Q8	1	1	1	--	2	1
Extended response	**Q3**, Q7, **Q15**, Q16, Q20	5	5	--	--	--	--
Matching sentences/ quotes to speakers	Q19	1	--	--	1	--	1
Sequencing	--	--	--	1	1	1	--
Table completion	Q13, Q14	2	--	--	--	--	1
Sentence completion	--	--	--	-	1	--	--
Multiple short/ extended response	**Q3, Q11, Q15**	3	--	--	--	--	--
Ticking boxes/ blackening circles	Q1	1	--	--	--	--	--

Question types used in Part B1

Question type	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	--	--	--	1	1	--	1
Main idea	Q31, Q44	2	3	5	--	1	3
Specific factual	Q23, Q25, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q32, Q34, Q35, **Q36**, Q38, Q40	11	9	8	15	12	6
Vocabulary	Q22, Q24, Q27, Q37, Q41, Q42, Q43 (ii)	7	3	2	4	1	2
Reference	Q39, Q43 (i, ii)	2	3	1	2	2	2
Inference	Q33	1	4	5	6	4	5
Language usage	Q30, **Q36**	2	2	--	--	--	--
Higher-order thinking	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Figurative language	--	--	--	1	--	--	--
Views justification	--	--	4	1	--	--	--
Sequencing	--	--	--	--	1	--	1

Note: Since some of the 2017 questions fall under more than one category, the totals here do not add up exactly to the number of questions in the exam. The code to these questions has been marked in **bold.**

Question formats used in Part B1

Question format	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q24, Q27, **Q29(ii)**, Q37, Q41, Q42, Q44	7	8	6	5	2	5
Short response	Q22, Q25, Q32, Q34, Q35, Q39, Q40	7	11	13	13	6	4
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	Q31	1	1	1	--	--	1
T/F/NG	Q28	1	1	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	--	--	--	1	1	--	--
Cloze summary	Q30, Q36	2	3	--	--	1	1
Extended response	Q23, **Q29(i)**	2	1	2	5	4	1
Matching sentences to speakers			--	--	--	1	1
Ordering events	--	--	--	--	1	--	2
Sentence completion	--	--	--	--	1	1	3
Ticking boxes/ blackening circles	Q38	1	1	--	1	3	1
Table completion (finding ideas to match examples)	Q33	1	--	--	--	--	--
Two-part short response	Q26, Q43	2	1	--	--	--	--

Note: Since some of the 2017 questions fall under more than one category, the totals here do not add up exactly to the number of questions in the exam. The code to these questions has been marked in **bold.**

Question types used in Part B2

Question type	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q57	1	--	2	--	--	--
Main idea	Q60	1	4	6	2	4	6
Specific factual	Q45(i, ii, iii), Q48(i, iii), Q46, **Q51**, Q52(i, ii, v, vi), Q55, Q58	**7**	5	1	7	5	3
Vocabulary	Q50	1	5	3	1	1	6
Reference	Q53(iii)	1	1	1	5	2	3
Inference	Q45(iv), Q47, Q48(ii, iv), Q49, Q52(iii, iv), Q54, Q56, Q59	8	9	6	8	4	9
Language usage	**Q51(ii, iii)**,	1	--	--	--	--	--
Figurative language	Q53(i, ii)	1	3	1	3	1	1
Views justification	--	--	2	2	--	--	1
Sequencing	--	--	--	--	--	1	1
Higher-order thinking	Q56	1	--	--	--	2	3

Note: Since some of the 2017 questions fall under more than one category, the totals here do not add up exactly to the number of questions in the exam. The code to these questions has been marked in **bold.**

Question formats used in Part B2

Question format	Question number	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q47, Q50, Q57	3	8	5	5	4	9
Short response	Q54	1	15	7	13	4	11
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	Q60	1	1	--	1	--	--
T/F/NG	Q45	1	1	1	--	1	1
Labelling pictures	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cloze summary		--		1	1	2	1
Extended response	Q55, Q56	2	2	5	4	7	9
Matching sentences to speakers	Q59	1	--	1	--	1	--
Sentence completion	**Q49, Q51**	**2**	2	--	1	--	1
Ticking boxes/ blackening circles	Q58	1	--	1	--	--	--
Proofreading	--	--	--	1	--	--	-
Ordering events	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
Timeline completion	--	--	--	--	1	--	--
Table / diagram completion	Q49, **Q51**, Q52	2	--	--	--	--	--
Multiple short response	Q46, Q48, Q53	3	--	--	--	--	--

Note: Since some of the 2017 questions fall under more than one category, the totals here do not add up exactly to the number of questions in the exam. The code to these questions has been marked in **bold.**

Paper 2

Part A

Question 1

Letter (proposal) (formal)

- The candidate's role as the writer should come as no surprise to the candidates—chairperson/member of a school club, this was also seen in the 2016 Paper 2 Part A.
- However, the context of the question itself (Social Service Club) is something that we have not seen so far as a Part A question—community project/service topic.
- Candidates are provided with two bullet points to serve as prompts and structural signposting.
    - This is nothing new either, though nothing is provided in the form of 'already written/provided' answers (i.e. already filled-in parts of the answer paper).
    - In last year's paper the greeting and first two sentences of the writing was already provided, which was seen to have provided an ample amount of support for the candidates.
- Candidates are also prompted to sign the letter as 'Chris Wong'; the amount of support this might have provided candidates is probably negligible, since they should have already been aware of this, given the format.

Part B

- The questions are more or less the same length as the ones found in the previous year's paper.
- Two out of eight questions have provided images as prompt. The only other time a Paper 2 Part B has provided an image in the questions has been 2012, and even then only one out of eight.
- This is the first time where an image has served as a direct writing prompt in a Part B question (Q3, short stories) as opposed to merely supplementing the question. (Note: 2013's Paper 2 also provided two photos for candidates to write about (albeit in Part A, not Part B.)
- The order in which the questions appear is different from the consistency seen in 2013–15 and the order seen in 2016.
- As in the previous years, most of the questions require formal or at least semi-formal responses. As noted in previous years this will be advantageous for weaker candidates, given that they will be able to insert stock formal phrases into their writing.
- Similar to the 2016 paper and some questions in the 2015 paper, questions this year are presented in two paragraphs. The first paragraph provides candidates with the setting and the second paragraph offers the specific task instructions. The only exception to this rule is Question 8: Sports Communication.
- It may be noteworthy to mention that five out of eight questions require candidates to justify a/their view with reasons and/or suggestions.

Question 2: Poems and Songs

Blog post (semi-formal)

- Candidates are required to write an online blog post on opportunities; they are prompted to write about one opportunity they have missed and one they have taken.
  - This is the first time a blog post has shown up in Paper 2, with the exception of the 2012 paper.
- The question itself has very little to do with the poems and songs elective; candidates are provided with a verse taken from a rap song by Eminem. Outside of this, the link between the question and the elective is tenuous at best. Candidates can actually ignore the song verse and would not be at any disadvantage when writing.
- This text type is uncommon; it is unlikely that many candidates chose this question, as it requires an ample amount of drawing upon personal experiences and knowledge outside of the elective.

Question 3: Short Stories

Short story

- Candidates are required to write a short story; this has been the norm for the Short Stories elective, barring the 2015 paper.
- It should come as no surprise that, once again, very little is provided in the way of writing prompts and direction.
  - Candidates are provided with the topic 'Wildlife' and an image, which is a first for this elective, of a lion in a kitchen.
- This question, and its elective, is likely to have maintained its unpopularity, given the lack of sufficient guidance and high amount of creative input required of the candidates. This is supported by previous Examination Reports suggesting that attempting creative writing in Paper 2 is risky at best.

Question 4: Drama

Essay (formal)

- Candidates are required to write an essay answering the question 'Is Romantic Love Necessary for a Happy Marriage'.
- Candidates are also provided with a quote from *Romeo and Juliet,* but this is largely irrelevant and unlikely to have provided the candidates with any guidance or support when approaching this question. In fact, candidates can forgo reading the quote at all and dive into the writing without being at any disadvantage.
- This question is another example of an exam question that is tenuously linked to the elective; the question itself has effectively nothing to do with drama—with the exception of the (largely irrelevant) quote from Shakespeare.

- It is doubtful that many candidates chose this question, as it seems to require a fair amount of knowledge and/or ideas outside of the prescribed course—not to mention trying to tackle the topic of 'love and marriage'.

Question 5: Popular Culture

Letter to the editor (formal)

- Candidates are required to write a letter to the editor justifying, with reasons and suggestions, a decision to protect two features of Hong Kong's culture.
- The topic should be relatively straightforward and will be quite familiar for the candidates, as it provides an acceptable amount of leeway for candidates to draw on personal experiences. The same can be said for the text type; candidates will have learnt the ins and outs of 'letter to the editor' in much detail leading up to the exam.
- With the exception of coming up with sufficient points (the question itself does not specify how many reasons/suggestions are required), this question should not be particularly challenging.

Question 6: Debating

Speech (formal)

- For the first time ever, the Debating question has featured the debate speech format. As has been noted in previous years, this would be the most natural text type to use for this elective.
- Candidates are required to provide three reasons to support the claim that watching television 'makes us smarter'. While the question has limited the debate question into a one-sided affair, arguing for being the only choice, it is still likely the most debate-appropriate question for this elective in recent years.
- It is also likely that a large amount of candidates will have chosen this question, given that many of them will be able to relate to the situation given.

Question 7: Social Issues

Report (formal)

- Candidates are required to write a report on 'NEETs' (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) in Hong Kong. This is the second time this text type has appeared in Paper 2; the first occurrence was in 2015.
- The term NEETs also appears in Paper 1 Part B1 Text 4, which can't be accidental.
- Satisfactory answers to the question will necessitate quite a lot of knowledge on the candidate's part on this social issue, and will require candidates to propose possible remedies to the issue with justification. As such, it is unlikely that many candidates will have chosen this question.

Question 8: Sports Communication

Article (school magazine) (formal)

- Candidates are required to write an article for a school magazine, arguing that dancers can be seen in the same vein as swimmers or basketball players and considered athletes.
- While the link between the elective and the question is tenuous, this question is not particularly challenging; it is likely that a large amount of candidates will have chosen this question, and might well have viewed it as the least difficult question in the paper. This is due in large part to the two bullet points offered in the rubric, providing candidates with an ample amount signposting and content to start with. There is also the fact that Sports Communication has widely been the most popular elective in Paper 2 over the years, according to the Examination Reports.
- Overall, the question is straightforward and not particularly challenging at all.

Question 9: Workplace Communication

Letter to the editor (formal)

- Candidates are required to write a letter to the editor, disagreeing to a claim that university graduates are less hard-working than before; this is to be justified with three reasons and/or examples.
- The link between the question and the elective is again tenuous at best.
- As long as candidates are able to come up with sufficient reasons and/or examples, this question should not be particularly challenging. The topic itself is likely to be something candidates will have become familiar with leading up to the exam.
- It would not be surprising to see that the Workplace Communication elective remains one of the more popular choices this year, as it has been in most years—with the exception of 2015.

Paper 3

Part A

4 tasks, 54 marks in total (the fewest marks since 2013; slightly fewer marks than the average)

- As in most previous years, the Part A situation does not assign a specific role to candidates (the only exception was the 2013 exam paper).
- The first two tasks are one page each and the last two tasks are two-page tasks (different from last year, when only Task 3 was two pages, but the same as 2014).
- This is the first year that no pictures are included in any of the Part A tasks.
- Task formats are similar to previous year; there are no new formats. Similar to last year, the rubric at the start of the task does not mention the task format (note sheet, table). Candidates are only told to fill in the missing information in the spaces provided.
- Quite a few of the answers are not given verbatim in the recording. Candidates need to digest what is said in the recording and think about what answers to write to fill in the blanks (examples will be illustrated below).
- There are not many difficult words in the recording. No words are spelt out in the recording.
- Progression in level of difficulty from Tasks 1–4 is quite pronounced this year, compared to last year. Task 4 is clearly the hardest, as candidates are expected to write quite a lot.
- Only Task 1 has a worked example unlike last year, where all the tasks had examples.
- There is a lot of repetition in the recording for Tasks 1 and 2, but less in Tasks 3 and 4.
- Unlike past years, candidates are not required to change parts of speech or make tense changes for their answers.
- None of the questions asks candidates to identify the speaker's attitude or understand the implied meanings from the speaker's tone.

Task 1

13 marks (close to average)

Format: 'Note sheet' (gap-fill/sentence completion/ticking boxes)

Listening for keywords and information
Listening for numbers and amounts
Listening for descriptions of cause and effect

- This is clearly the easiest of the four tasks. Candidates only need to write at most four words to fill in the gaps (except for Q7).
- The recording speed is slow, the enunciation is generally clear and the answers are spoken in the order they appear in the note sheet. There are also quite a lot of repetitions (although some are paraphrased).

- Sometimes, the answers cannot be directly lifted from the recording. For example, the recording says 'The other name for a "twin city" you might have heard of is a "sister city"', while Q2 actually requires candidates to write 'sister cities' (in the plural form) because the subject of the sentence is 'twin cities'. Marks may not be given if candidates do not change the answer to the plural form.
- Q8 is also quite tricky. The speaker says 'a small town of a few thousand people would usually just twin with another town'. Candidate may tick the box for '1 only' mistakenly if they are not aware that the question is asking about 'a big city', and they may miss out when the correct answer is more explicitly enunciated in the later part of the recording.
- Q9–Q13 are relatively easy because the answers are given verbatim in the recording.

Task 2

13 marks (close to average)

Format: 'Note sheet' (gap-fill/sentence completion)

Listening for numbers and amounts
Listening for keywords and information
Listening for times and dates
Listening for descriptions of cause and effect

- This task is also fairly straightforward, but the recording speed is slightly faster than Task 1. The enunciation is generally clear and the answers are spoken in the order they appear.
- Task 2 may prove to be a bit harder than Task 1 (and also Task 2 last year) in terms of the number of words candidates need to write, e.g. Q18: 'a lot of life experience to offer', Q20: 'have enthusiasm for other cultures'.
- Although candidates need to write longer answers, repetitions can be found for most of the answers. Clear signals are also given so that candidates know when the answer is coming up, e.g. 'So what about students?', 'What about the members of the general public?'
- Q14 involves some sort of calculation. Candidates will not get the answer '10' directly from the recording. They have to get the hint from this line 'We're looking for five students, and five members of the general public'.
- Q15: Candidates may write 'secondary school and university' as the answer and lose marks if they miss out the words 'or older'.
- Q16: It is possible that candidates will be listening out for a number here and might be thrown off when they hear 'retired'. While it is true that the speaker reiterates 'Retired? Now that's what I call an age limit', it nevertheless might be a source of initial confusion.
- Less able candidates may struggle to spell the words 'knowledge' (Q19) and 'enthusiasm' (Q20).

Task 3

15 marks (close to average)

Format: table completion (gap-fill/sentence completion)

Listening for keywords and information
Listening for main ideas and supporting points
Listening for opinions

- Task 3 has the highest number of marks among all of the tasks in Part A this year.
- Task 3 has two pages: this has been the case in Paper 3 since 2014.
- The speed of the recording is fast, especially for Video 2, and the answers come quite quickly but there is a lot of writing required. Candidates may have difficulty writing down the answers in time.
- There are very few repetitions in the recording of this task.
- Candidates may not be familiar with the phrase 'hospitality box' (Video 1 Location 2), though it will not affect their performance of this task because 'hospitality box' is not one of the answers.
- Q30–Q33: Only blank lines are provided in the table. Candidates cannot rely on the words before or after the blanks to get a hint of when the answer is coming up, so this adds difficulty to the task. The candidates' ability to extract useful information from the chatter around the answers is tested.
- Some candidates may struggle to spell the words 'communist' (Q40) and 'architecture' (Q41).

Task 4

13 marks (close to average)

Format: Interview Question-Answer sheet (longer answers/sentences)

Listening for keywords and information
Listening for sequence
Listening for attitudes and opinions
Listening for descriptions of cause and effect
Summarizing information

- Like in 2015 and 2016, Task 4 asks candidates to answer open-ended questions which require a fair bit of writing.
- 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 also 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.

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- The marks for Task 4 are slightly more than that in 2015 and 2016 (11 marks).
- Even whilst not carrying the most marks, Task 4 is still the hardest task in Part A.
- Like in 2015 and 2016, candidates are given 30 seconds to study the task (in 2012–14, they had one minute). However, they are now given three minutes to tidy up their answers at the end of Part A (it was always two minutes in previous years).
- The speed of recording is not as fast as Task 3. The enunciation is clearer than Task 3 too.
- Lemy Chan is one of the speakers in the recording, so when candidates answer questions about her in the task, they have to change the answers from the first person to the third person, which is different from last year's Task 4.
- Q51 might be confusing as it is not clear what is expected for the answer. Should the answer be an adjective describing attitudes? Should candidates quote Lemy's actions so as to show her attitude? This question involves a bit of higher order thinking. It is likely that candidates will need to answer the question using their own words.
- 'Tractor' (Q54) apparently is not a word that Hong Kong students are familiar with. Candidates may have difficulty getting the correct word, but they may be able to guess the spelling of the word from the pronunciation.

Part B: Recording/Note-taking sheet
- The overall Part B format is similar to the previous years' papers. But this is the first time that Tasks 6 to 10 do not carry the same 18 marks. There is a remarkable variety in the marks, ranging from 13 to 22 marks.
- The situation is not thematically linked to the Part A tasks, but the listening component of Part B features the same radio show host, Charlie Meadows.
- The recording is longer than last year, and is also slightly longer than the average.
- The speed of the recording is similar to Task 4 in Part A. There are three speakers in the recording. Norman Kwok speaks faster than the other two speakers.
- When candidates are required to write down a longer point it is usually repeated.
- Like previous years, two subheadings are exclusively for B1 tasks (about the Jade Islands) and the other two are exclusively for B2 (about the Golden Flower Island).
- The headings are addressed in order except for the points about Jade Islands being a good place for children, which are addressed after the problems with Jade Islands and the waterfall in the Golden Flower Adventure Mall. The transition from one heading to another is not very explicit.
- There is a complete split between Parts B1 and B2 in the recording and note-taking sheet: 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 the essential details are repeated, e.g. 'four years to finish/built', '6000 people'.
- Subheading 2: All of the information here is for the B1 tasks. The information candidates are expected to write down is longer than Subheading 1, but the key points are also repeated.

- Subheading 3: All of the information here is for B2. The only piece of information that candidates need to note down is 'waterfall' and '40 metres'. Other information (such as how the waterfall at the Highland Adventure Centre caused the clouds and power failure) is not as important because it is not needed in the answers (but it would give candidates background information for Task 8).
- Subheading 4: All of the information here is for B2 and the essential details are repeated.
- Some advanced vocabulary used in the recording: *pedestrianized, vegetation, interfered, envisage*, etc.

Part B1: Data File

- There are eight DF items this year (fewer than last year and the average).
- There are fewer DF items in Part B1 than B2 this year again (2015 was the only exception).
- The total word count of all DF items is about 100 words fewer than the average. This is also the year with the fewest words since 2013.
- Most of the DF items are quite familiar. The text types were seen in previous exams, namely a report (2015) and WhatsApp messages (2015).
- It is surprising that there are four emails out of eight DF items.
- There are graphics in item 5 with very few words, which make this Data File item very easy to skim. The inclusion of graphics this year (B1 DF item 5) might probably be the EAA's attempt to increase the extent of multimodality (visual literacy) in the HKDSE examination.
- No headings are provided in the instructional text for DF2 (the standard practice since 2014).
- The items do not appear in the order candidates need to use them (same as previous years).

Task 5

17 marks

Complete a sales brochure using information from the Data File and the recording

- It is estimated that there are 14 content points, which leaves 3 marks for language. As this is not a gap-filling task, it would make sense if more marks were allocated for language than last year.
- Candidates need to refer to their notes from the recording, the instructional email and DF items 4, 5 and 8.
- Unlike last year where some blanks only required candidates to write short answers like the name of the speaker, the date and time, this year's Task 5 requires candidates to write longer answers.
- Candidates would have noted down the information '4 years' and '6000' in the note sheet. However, '4 years' and '6000' are given in Task 5 and candidates are asked to form questions based on the answers instead. This is a new format to test candidates.

- If candidates missed 'pedestrianised streets' or do not know how to spell the phrase, it is repeated in DF item 5.
- Questions 1a–1c are unusual, as they only appeared in the 2009 HKASL Use of English Task 1. Since short answers have been given, the expected questions would be *wh*-questions that are grammatically correct.
- If candidates choose to write about the number of station stops for subheading 3, this could be tricky, as the terminuses (the small circles in B1 DF item 4) might also have to be counted in the total.
- Cross-referencing skills are needed when they write a description for subheading 5, as they need to understand what 'the solar and wind technologies' in B1 DF item 8 refers to then referring to B1 DF item 5.

Task 6

19 marks

Write an email to the winners of the Jade Islands Home View Day competition using information from the B1 DF (120 words)

- This is the first time where Task 6 carries 19 marks. If the language marks are not changed (9 marks), candidates may now be given more marks on task completion.
- This task is quite straightforward and fairly easy. Candidates need to refer to the instructional email and DF items 6 and 7.
- Candidates are given clear guidance for this task in the instructional email (DF2) and are directed to the DF items they need to use. Like last year, they are provided with three clear points to work from which will help them structure their writing.
- The only tricky points for this task are the change of information in the Data File. There are distractors in the texts which may make careless candidates lose marks. For example, Norman first says that the bus will be back at the Marcliffe at 6 p.m. but then changes it to 6.15 p.m. The date of the Home Viewing Day is also changed from the 11th to 18th.
- It's unclear whether the information about a free glass of wine is required in the answer.
- Candidates might experience difficulty in formulating the subject of the email, since the email should be written in a semi-formal style.
- In terms of locating information, this text might be slightly easier than Task 5.

Task 7

17 marks

Write a letter to the Jade Islands Residents' Concern Group using information from the Data File and the recording (120 words)

- This is the first time where Task 7 carries 17 marks and the word limit is 120 words. There is quite a lot of information to cover in the letter so, with a word limit of 30 words fewer than previous years, the writing needs to be really concise.
- Candidates need to refer to their notes, the instructional email and DF items 3 and 8.
- Like the other two tasks in Part B1, candidates are given clear guidance for this task in the instructional email (DF2) and are directed to the DF items they need to use.

Part B2: Data File

- There are 11 DF items this year (one more item than last year).
- The total word count of all DF items is very close to last year's, but it is slighter higher than the average.
- Like Part B1, emails are the most common text types in the Data File items in Part B2 (five emails out of 11 DF items).
- Other familiar text types which appeared in previous exams: extract from a book, article, meeting minutes, Skype chat. DF item 5 'PlinyPedia entry' may be new to candidates. They could see it as a mini-biography, though (similar to 2014 Text 4).
- There are more visual sources than in Part B1. There are pictures in some Data File items, and there is a line graph in DF item 10.
- There is no overlap whatsoever between B1 and B2 in terms of Data File items. The two Data Files are completely different.
- Like Part B1, no headings are provided in the instructional text for DF2 (the standard practice since 2014).
- The items do not appear in the order candidates need to use them (same as previous years).

Task 8

22 marks

Write a summary of opinion on the initial concept plan for the Golden Flower Adventure Mall using information from the Data File and the recording (220 words)

- This is the first time candidates have been asked to write a summary.
- 220 words is the highest limit we have seen for Task 8. It is also the highest limit we have seen since the first HKDSE exam in 2012. It is 100 words more than the word limit last year, and is very much higher than the average.
- Task 8 carries 22 marks, which hasn't been the case since the first year of the HKDSE in 2012. Candidates are given guidance for what points to include in the task. However, unlike Part B1, they are not directed to the DF items they need to use.
- Candidates need to refer to their notes, the instructional email and DF items 4, 6–9. Task 8 is requires candidates to read the most Data File items in Part B2.

- As the instructional email doesn't explicitly state the number of features that need to be addressed, candidates may miss one of them.
- The trickiest part is that the opinions have to be collated and verified against other sources.
- DF item 7 mentions abseiling and also provides a picture of it. Candidates may be confused as to whether they need to include it as a feature of the Golden Flower Adventure Mall because it says 'Obviously, we could never have the general public abseiling actually in the waterfall like this guy'. They may find the next sentence 'It would have to be on the sides' ambiguous.
- The content point in DF item 8 'the waterfall [at the Golden Flower Adventure Mall had to be reduced] from 45 to 30 metres' might be tricky to catch. Candidates may miss out this information as it requires a higher level of thinking.

Task 9

18 marks

Write an overview of what DPP has done in Hong Kong to protect the environment using information from the Data File and the recording (150 words)

- This is the first time candidates have been asked to write an overview.
- Candidates are asked to write about 150 words (the same as last year, but fewer than the average).
- Candidates need to refer to their notes, the instructional email and DF items 3 and 10.
- Task 9 is definitely easier than Task 8, in terms of the number of Data File items candidates need to write and the word limit. Also, DF items 3 and 10 are quite formal, so candidates can easily lift the information out of the overview without struggling to change the tone of the text.
- It is indicated in the instructional email that candidates should write what DPP has done *in Hong Kong* to protect the environment. Candidates need to extract information from DF item 10, and not to include the information about DPP donating money to the Save the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. If candidates do not read the instructions carefully, they will end up wasting time writing content points that are not necessary.

Task 10

13 marks

Write a letter to invite the guest of honour for the Opening Ceremony for the Golden Flower Adventure Mall using information from the Data File (100 words)

- Candidates are asked to write only 100 words for this task. This is the shortest word limit we have seen for Task 10 (the word limit was always 200 words in previous exams).

- It is estimated that there are at least 10 content points for this task, not to mention the opening and closing of a proper letter of invitation. It is quite impossible to include so many details within the word limit.
- This task does not require any information from the recording. All the necessary information can be found in just three Data File items: the instructional email and DF items 5 and 11.
- It can be said that Part B2 no longer reflects a progressive level of difficulty. With fewer words to write and fewer Data File items to read, Task 10 seems easier than Tasks 8 and 9.
- However, the instructional email instructs candidates that they need to persuade Ms Tse to accept the invitation. It might be quite tricky for them to adopt a persuasive tone, especially when they are constrained by the word limit.

Statistics

Marks

	Part A					Part B1			Part B2		
	Task 1	*Task 2*	*Task 3*	*Task 4*	*Total*	*Task 5*	*Task 6*	*Task 7*	*Task 8*	*Task 9*	*Task 10*
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
2016	15	16	16	11	58	18	18	18	18	18	18
Av	14.2	14.2	15.2	13.8	57.4	16.8	18	18	18	18	18
2017	**13**	**13**	**15**	**13**	**54**	**17**	**19**	**17**	**22**	**18**	**13**

Average number of words per mark in Part A answers

	Task 1	*Task 2*	*Task 3*	*Task 4*
2012	1.4 (18/13)	1.8 (23/13)	2.3 (32/14)	1.6 (21/13)
2013	2 (28/14)	4.7 (28/6)	1.2 (11/9)	2.1 (34/16)
2014	1.1 (13/12)	1.4 (21/15)	1.7 (26/15)	2.1 (37/18)
2015	1.7 (29/17)	2 (28/14)	3.2 (51/16)	5.5 (61/11)
2016	2 (31/15)	1.88 (30/16)	2.38 (38/16)	4.6 (51/11)
Av	1.64	23.4	21.6	31.8
2017	**1.84 (24/13)**	**3.15 (41/13)**	**5 (75/15)**	**6.15 (80/13)**

Content points in Tasks 6–10

	Task 5	*Task 6*		*Task 7*		*Task 8*		*Task 9*		*Task 10*	
	CPs	*TC*	*CPs*	*TC*	*CPs*	*TC*	*CPs*	*TC*	*CPs*	*TC*	*CPs*
2012	14	9	12	9	15	9	15	9	13	9	14
2013	16	9	9	9	18	9	13	9	9	9	13
2014	14	9	9	9	10	9	15	9	11	9	10
2015	16	9	10	9	12	9	12	9	11	9	13
2016	16	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	11	9	12
Av	15.2	9	9.8	9	13	9	12.8	9	11	9	12.4
2017	**14***	**9**	**12***	**9**	**9***	**9**	**15***	**9**	**12***	**9**	**10***

TC = Task Completion, CPs = Content Points (*Estimate)

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Tapescript word count

	Part A				Part B	Total
	Task 1	*Task 2*	*Task 3*	*Task 4*		
2012	571	868	742	580	1079	3840
2013	822	1037	476	624	1213	4172
2014	815	612	922	984	1106	4439
2015	728	670	915	754	895	3962
2016	536	549	678	802	931	3496
Av	694.4	747.2	746.6	748.8	1044.8	3981.8
2017	**815**	**572**	**780**	**932**	**1190**	**4289**

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	6	1040	7	1738
2013	8	1224	9	1836
2014	8	1487	12	1872
2015	10	1410	9	2057
2016	8	1226	9	1979
Av	8	1227.4	9.2	1896.4
2017	**8**	**1366**	**10**	**2280**

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
2016	–	120	150	120	150	200
Av	–	120	150	138	160	200
2017	–	**120**	**120**	**220**	**150**	**100**