

CONFIDENTIAL

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HKDSE 2018 observations

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Paper 1

Part A

- Two texts (Text 1: Classified ads; Text 2: Article)
- 22 Questions (Text 1: 3 questions; Text 2: 19 questions)
- 42 Marks (Text 1: 9 marks; Text 2: 33 marks)
- 1090 words: (Text 1: 160 words; Text 2: 930 words)

Reading passages

Text 1: Classified ads (text type: advertisements)

Text 2: Does music really help you concentrate (text type: article, with comments)

- Text 1 is likely to be an original work.
- The questions for Text 1 are much easier than those for Text 2.
- The purpose of the questions for Text 1 seems to be to help less able candidates get some marks.
- Source of Text 2: Adapted from *The Guardian*:
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/aug/20/does-music-really-help-you-concentrate#comments>
- Most of the original text has been kept.
- The article is about listening to music while working, which should be a familiar topic for most candidates.
- Like with Parts B1 and B2, the total word count of the Part A reading passages is the highest we've seen in the DSE, but overall, it comes across as easier than usual.

Comprehension section: question types

- There are more vocabulary questions than in any previous year, and more reference questions than last year. The number of questions about specific factual information is much smaller than last year.
- Like in previous years, there is a clear progression of difficulty and the questions involving text analysis and requiring inference skills tend to appear towards the end of part A.

Comprehension section: question formats

- As usual, there is a large number of short-response and multiple-choice questions.

Comprehension section: noteworthy questions

- Q4: This is the third year in a row that Part A has included at least one question with pictures/photos.
- Q10 tests understanding of the rather advanced 'innocuous'. However, the question isn't actually that hard as the paragraph is short and contains only three other adjectives.
- Q15: This question may be challenging for some candidates as they need to distil a lot of information from the text into the answer.
- Q16 is a bit confusing, as 'working companions' isn't a reference in the text but a description.

- Q17 features another conspicuously new-looking format, but it isn't actually very different from 2017's Q51.
- Q18: this is the second year in a row that the candidates' understanding of irony has been tested. This might be one of the most challenging questions in Part A, as it is quite hard to describe the irony in the text even for those candidates who understand the meaning of irony.

Question types used in Part A

Question type	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q20, Q21	2	--	--	1	--	1	1
Main idea	Q6	1	1	4	7	1	2	3
Specific factual	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q11, Q19	5	14	8	2	13	9	7
Vocabulary	Q1, Q8, Q10, Q14	4	1	--	2	--	1	2
Reference	Q5, Q9, Q16	3	--	1	4	4	1	1
Inference	Q12, Q13, Q15, Q18, Q22	5	1	3	7	10	8	5
Higher-order thinking	--	--	2	--	2	1	--	--
Figurative language	Q7,	1	1	--	2	--	1	--
Views justification	--	--	1	1	3	--	--	1
Sequencing	Q17	1	--	--	1	1	1	--

Question formats used in Part A

Question format	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q3, Q7, Q12, Q13, Q19, Q20, Q21	7	6	5	1	6	7	6
Short response	Q1, Q5, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q14	7	5	2	17	13	7	6
Matching subheadings/main points	--	--	--	2	--	1	--	--
T/F/NG	--	--	1	1	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	Q4	1	--	1	--	1	1	1
Cloze completion	Q6, Q17	2	1	1	1	--	2	1
Extended response	Q15, Q18	2	5	5	--	--	--	--
Matching sentences/quotes to speakers	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	1
Sequencing	--	--	--	--	1	1	1	--
Table completion	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	1
Sentence completion	Q16	1	--	--	-	1	--	--
Multiple short/extended response	--	--	3	--	--	--	--	--
Ticking boxes/blackening circles/matching	Q2, Q22	2	1	--	--	--	--	--

Part B1

- Two texts, as in the 2017 Part B1 (Text 3: Informational guide; Text 4: Article)
- 23 questions (Text 3: 12 questions; Text 4: 11 questions)
- 42 Marks (Text 3: 22 marks; Text 4: 20 marks)
- 1066 words (Text 3: 581 words; Text 4: 485 words)

Reading passages

Text 3: A Guide to Bee Stings (text type: informational guide)

- Source: adapted from <https://www.rentokil.com.hk/en/bees/stings/>
- This is an informational guide on how to deal with bee stings, taken from the website of the pest control company Rentokil.
- The text is easy to read as there are five subheadings.
- Language and sentence structures are rather simple. Most of the answers are straightforward.
- To a large extent, candidates should be able to get the answers because they are familiar with the topic.

Text 4: Hong Kong's First Urban Beekeeper (text type: article)

- Source: adapted from <http://assemblepapers.com.au/2013/10/17/high-rise-honey-michael-leung/>
- This is an article describing how bees are kept on the rooftops of high-rise apartments.
- This text is less segmented than Text 3 and the language is slightly more advanced, with some challenging lexical items such as 'city dwellers', 'behavioural variances', 'eclectic' and 'collaborating'.
- The total word count of the two Part B1 reading passages is the highest we've seen in the DSE, by quite a wide margin. As with Part A, though, it still comes across as rather easy, on the whole.

Comprehension section: question types

- Most of the questions are straightforward and easy to understand.
- There are three reference questions and one question on comparing Chinese and western beekeeping methods.
- The mark distribution between the two texts is rather even (Text 3: 576 words and 22 marks; Text 4: 447 words and 20 marks)
- The question levels are appropriate for Part B1, the easier section. It is much easier than the B1 sections of previous years' papers.
- Mostly straightforward specific factual and vocabulary questions, although there are some that require further thinking.

Comprehension section: question formats

- Mostly short/extended-response and other straightforward question formats for Text 3 (two True/False/Not Given questions, four MC questions, two clozes).

Comprehension section: noteworthy questions

- Q26: this table format has appeared previously; candidates are required to identify and relate main ideas found in several paragraphs.
- Q27: candidates have to pay attention to the instruction to fill the blanks with 'a word or a phrase from paragraphs 5–7'.
- Q29: this is a new format for a main idea question, but it is very easy.
- Q42 looks like a basic specific factual question, but inference skills are also needed as candidates have to look for clues like 'surprisingly' and 'amaze'.
- Q43 is another question for which candidates have to infer the answer from the text.

Question types used in Part B1

Question type	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	Q45	1	--	--	1	1	--	1
Main idea	Q29, Q36	3	1	3	5	--	1	3
Specific factual	Q23, Q24, Q25, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q37, Q39, Q40,	10	11	9	8	15	12	6
Vocabulary	Q28, Q44	2	7	3	2	4	1	2
Reference	Q30, Q38, Q41	3	2	3	1	2	2	2
Inference	Q35, Q42, Q43	3	1	4	5	6	4	5
Language usage	--	--	2	2	--	--	--	--
Higher-order thinking	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Figurative language	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--
Views justification	--	--	--	4	1	--	--	--
Sequencing	Q27	1	--	--	--	1	--	1
Relationship between ideas	Q26	1	1	--	--	--	--	--

Question formats used in Part B1

Question format	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q24, Q31, Q35, Q45	4	7	8	6	5	2	5
Short response	Q28, Q29, Q30, Q38, Q41, Q42, Q44	7	7	11	13	13	6	4
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	--	--	1	1	1	--	--	1
T/F/NG	Q25, Q39,	2	1	1	1	2	2	1
Labelling pictures	--	--	--	--	1	1	--	--
Cloze summary	Q27, Q36	2	2	3	--	--	1	1
Extended response	Q32, Q33, Q34, Q40, Q43	5	2	1	2	5	4	1
Matching sentences to speakers	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1
Ordering events	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	2
Sentence completion	Q23	1	--	--	--	1	1	3
Ticking boxes/blackening circles /matching	Q37	1	1	1	--	1	3	1
Table completion	Q26	1	1	--	--	--	--	--
Two-part short response	--	--	2	1	--	--	--	--

Part B2

- Two texts, as in 2012 and 2015 (Text 5: Radio story; Text 6: Novel extract)
- 26 Questions (Text 5: 9 questions; Text 6: 17 questions)
- 42 Marks (Text 5: 13 marks; Text 6: 29 marks)
- 1213 words (Text 5: 447 words; Text 6: 766 words)

Reading passages

Text 5: Farmers Resort to Hand Pollination (text type: a story from National Public Radio)

- Source: Adapted from the story
<https://www.npr.org/sections/kruhwich/2013/12/04/248795791/how-important-is-a-bee>
- As in Part B1, the theme is about bees: how humans pollinate instead of the bees.
- There has now been a thematic link between Parts B1 and B2 three years in a row.
- The text is more difficult than the B1 texts, yet much easier than previous B2 texts.
- The text is easily comprehensible and the questions are quite straightforward.
- There are subheadings which facilitate reading.
- Some challenging words/phrases which require deeper understanding: 'hit blossom-time', 'critters', 'the logic of the market'.
- A new concept to use a story from a radio programme.

Text 6: Sweetness and Light (text type: prologue from the book The Mysterious History of the Honeybee, by Hattie Ellis, 2006)

- Source: Adapted from <http://publicism.info/nature/sweetness/1.html>
- It requires candidates to understand how beekeepers keep the bees.
- Quite a bit more advanced than Text 5.

Comprehension section: question types

- It seems that there are some extended questions which require candidates' deeper thought. However, they are quite straightforward and answers can be taken from the texts.
- As is customary in B2, the most common question type is inference, which appears nine times (Q48, Q49, Q51, Q54, Q55, Q57, Q58, Q69, Q71). Q71 can also be classified as identifying views question, as it requires candidates to match likely statements/comments/quotes to people mentioned in the text. This question type seems to appear every year, however, each time it is presented in a different format.
- There are also several vocabulary/phrase comprehension questions (Q46, Q49, Q50, Q52, Q62), and figurative language is tested in Q46, Q47, Q59, Q64, Q66, Q67 and Q68.

Comprehension section: question formats

- There are no conspicuously ‘new’ question formats this year. All formats used are straightforward and should be very familiar to candidates.
- The most popular are the multiple-choice (Q48, Q51, Q57, Q58) and short/extended response (in a total of 17 questions). There are also three summary cloze completion questions (Q53, Q60, Q70).
- Q68 tests candidates’ understanding of literary devices (metaphor).

Comprehension section: noteworthy questions

- Q47: candidates need to infer the meaning from the text as the phrase is somewhat figurative.
- Q48: the question requires the candidates to read through Paragraph 2 and deduce the moral of the story.
- Q49: similarly, in order to deduce what ‘the work’ refers to, candidates need to understand the gist of the whole paragraph.
- Q52: this is a rather challenging question as candidates can’t get the meaning of the word ‘critters’ from the text.
- Q53: (i) is quite challenging as candidates have to get the answer from ‘What they learned was a shocker’ (line 14). Also, candidates have to get the answer for (ii), ‘absent’/‘missing’, from ‘the absence of bees’ and the answer for (iv), ‘dry’, from the opposite meaning of ‘windy, rainy weather’.
- Q57: candidates need to read the whole paragraph in order to get the answer.
- Q60: candidates need to change the text’s active use of the verb ‘restrict’ to the passive ‘restricted’ for the answer to (iii). For the answer to (iv), they need to pay attention to the negative sense of the question and change the text’s ‘a quiet tread’ to ‘noisily’/‘loudly’.
- Q62: to get this answer, candidates need to understand the meaning of the rather advanced ‘heaves’.
- Q64: to answer this correctly, candidates need to know not just what ‘drama’ means but also what it generally entails.
- Q65, Q66, Q67 are very easy questions for B2, even though Q66 and Q67 require candidates to understand figurative language. Answers can be directly taken from the text.
- Q70: candidates need to change the text’s ‘carelessly’ to ‘careless’ for the answer to (i), and for (ii), they have to get the answer (‘important’) from the text’s ‘bees matter more than honey’.

Question types used in Part B2

Question type	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Thematic	--	--	1	--	2	--	--	--
Main idea	Q53, Q60, Q70	3	1	4	6	2	4	6
Specific factual	Q56, Q61, Q63	3	7	5	1	7	5	3
Vocabulary	Q46, Q50, Q52, Q62	4	1	5	3	1	1	6
Reference	Q65	1	1	1	1	5	2	3
Inference	Q48, Q49, Q51, Q54, Q55, Q57, Q58, Q69, Q71	9	8	9	6	8	4	9
Figurative language	Q47, Q59, Q64, Q66, Q67, Q68	6	1	3	1	3	1	1
Views justification	--	--	--	2	2	--	--	1
Sequencing	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1
Higher-order thinking	--	--	1	--	--	--	2	3
Identifying views	Q71	1						

Question formats used in Part B2

Question format	Question number	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Multiple choice	Q48, Q51, Q57, Q58	4	3	8	5	5	4	9
Short response	Q46, Q47, Q50, Q52, Q55, Q62, Q65, Q66, Q67, Q68	10	1	15	7	13	4	11
Matching subheadings/main points to paragraphs	--	--	1	1	--	1	--	--
T/F/NG	Q61	1	1	1	1	--	1	1
Labelling pictures	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cloze summary	Q53, Q60, Q70	3	--		1	1	2	1
Extended response	Q49, Q54, Q56, Q59, Q63, Q64, Q69	7	2	2	5	4	7	9
Matching sentences to speakers	Q71	1	1	--	1	--	1	--
Sentence completion	--	--	2	2	--	1	--	1
Ticking boxes/blackening circles	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	--
Proofreading	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	-
Ordering events	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
Timeline completion	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--
Table / diagram completion	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--
Multiple short response	--	--	3	--	--	--	--	--

Paper 1 statistics

Word counts of reading passages

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)
2017	1057	768 (354 + 25 + 389)	1190
2018	1090 (160+930)	1066 (581+485)	1213 (447+766)
Average	1028	890	1133

Reading levels

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)
2017	51.5	11.36	70.65	7.99	38.4	14.22
2018	44	10.12	Text 3: 69.3 Text 4: 55.3 Average: 62.3	Text 3: 8.88 Text 4: 11.06 Average: 9.97	Text 5: 59.8 Text 6: 77.1 Average: 68.45	Text 5: 9.64 Text 6: 7.48 Average: 8.56
Average	62.4	9.92	63.18	9.2	54.97	10.81

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

Number 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
2017	21	41	22	43	15	43
2018	22	42	23	42	26	42
Average	24	43	24	42	24	42

Paper 2

Part A

Question 1

Letter to parents (formal)

- The candidate's role as the writer is a class teacher, which is a bit different from previous years.
- However, the content shouldn't be too challenging for most candidates as it is about a school trip, which is something the candidates can easily relate to.
- A poster and a mindmap are given to candidates. This is a new feature in Paper 2.
- The poster provides information about the details of the destination, e.g. opening hours, entrance fee.
- The mindmap is intended to serve as a prompt for structuring the letter. One thing worth mentioning about the mindmap is that there is a question mark, which is quite similar to the S3 TSA format.
- The most challenging aspect of this task for candidates seems to be the format of the letter, the tone and the register. Candidates need to pay special attention to the bottom part of the letter; otherwise they will miss the signature and the date.
- Unlike last year, candidates are not explicitly instructed to sign the letter 'Chris Wong'.

Part B

This year, the order of questions is different from previous years.

Question 2: Sports Communication

Blog post (semi-formal)

- Candidates are required to write a blog post to encourage other young people to take part in a marathon. This is the second year in a row that a blog post has shown up in Paper 2.
- The question itself is quite straightforward and there are almost no prompts except for the statement 'You recently ran the Hong Kong Marathon for the first time'.
- Obviously, any candidates who have personal experience of running a marathon would have a distinct advantage when answering this question.

Question 3: Workplace Communication

A letter (formal)

- Candidates are required to write a letter to staff addressing their complaints about work-related emails and text messages received out of office. Candidates may find the role as writer a bit challenging as they will have no personal experience of being the boss of a company.
- This question provides very little background information, so candidates need to figure out the reasons why staff don't want to receive e-mails and text messages out of office. They also need to address the issues from the perspective, and with the mentality, of a boss.
- This is a very challenging question as candidates need to use the right tone and register to respond to the complaints. Also, they need to think like a boss, something for which the candidates may rely only on their own imaginations.

Question 4: Social Issues

A letter of advice (informal)

- Candidates are required to write a letter of advice to respond to a problem encountered by a teenager.
- The topic is straightforward and will be familiar to the candidates. There should also be sufficient information given in the question for candidates to come up with a response.
- This question is likely to be one of the most popular questions among candidates as many of them should be familiar with both the format and the content.

Question 5: Debating

A debating speech (formal)

- For the second year in a row, the Debating question requires candidates to write a debate speech.
- The number of reasons/arguments is not specified this year. Candidates are asked to write a debate speech with the motion 'The policy of reporting students' class position should be abolished'. Candidates can choose to argue either for or against the motion.
- The prompt given in this question is a report card. The purpose of the prompt seems to be to explain the term 'class position' used in the question.
- This question should not be particularly challenging as it is linked to candidates' everyday life.

Question 6: Popular Culture

A newspaper article (semi-formal)

- Candidates are required to write an article for the local newspaper explaining possible reasons for the rise in popularity of 'athleisure'.
- The pictures serve as prompts for this question. They help candidates understand the concept of 'athleisure'.
- This question should not be particularly hard to understand for the candidates. However, candidates who are not into fashion will likely find it challenging to think of reasons for the rise in popularity of a fashion trend.
- It might be one of the most challenging questions as it requires candidates to have some knowledge and understanding about fashion and lifestyles.

Question 7: Drama

An article (semi-formal)

- Candidates are required to write an article for a magazine discussing whether video recordings of live drama performances from theatres are a good way to attract people to watch stage plays.
- Unlike the drama question in 2017, this question is closely related to drama.
- The challenge of this question is that candidates need to give a brief explanation about the contents of the recording that they 'have just watched' before they justify whether showing these recordings is a good way to attract more people.
- To give a satisfactory answer to this question, candidates need to have some understanding of drama.

Question 8: Poems and Songs

An application letter (formal)

- Candidates are required to write an application letter for a poetry workshop.
- Unlike last year's poems and songs question, this rubric is closely related to the task completion of the letter, giving plenty of prompts as to what information the answer should contain.
- This question is quite straightforward. However, to give a satisfactory answer to this question, candidates need to have some understanding of poetry.

Question 9: Short Stories

A short story

- Like in all previous Paper 2s, except the 2015 one, candidates are required to write a short story for this elective.
- It is not surprising that, once again, very little is provided in the way of writing prompts and direction. Candidates are provided with an image and a situation. One thing that's worth noting is that candidates are required to write from the bird's point of view, which requires a high amount of creativity and imagination.
- This question, and the Short Stories elective, is likely to have maintained its unpopularity.

Paper 3

Part A

Situation: An online magazine about science and culture, featuring several conversations between people who work for the magazine as well as a weekly podcast.

Four tasks, 51 marks in total (the lowest number yet recorded in the DSE)

- 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 task consists of one page and the rest of the tasks are all two-page tasks.
- The answers are generally straightforward and only a few answers require candidates to digest what is said in the recording and think about what answers to write.
- There are a few challenging words and only one first name is spelt out in the recording.
- As in previous years, the level of difficulty progresses from task 1 to task 4, but the progression is not as pronounced this year. The overall level of difficulty is also noticeably lower than it has been in the past.
- Like last year, candidates are not required to change parts of speech 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

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

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for cause and effect.

Summary: This task requires candidates to listen to specific information and keywords in the context of a magazine. The recording is of a conversation between Kaity Chandra, the editor, and two journalists, Iris Mu and Dan Lai. There are two main subheadings on the form. The first one is 'What Iris, Dan and Kaity did at the weekend' and the second one is 'Suggested topics for the next edition of the magazine'.

- This task is the easiest of the four tasks.
- Candidates are required to fill in the blanks with phrases or words, except for Q10 and Q13 in which candidates are required to write complete sentences.
- Q10 and Q13 are a bit tricky as candidates may not realize they need to write in complete sentences if they don't read the example carefully.

Task 2

Format: graph and note sheet (gap-fill/sentence completion/labelling and marking symbols)

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for instructions

Listening for sequences

Listening for location

Summary: There are three parts in this task. In part A, Iris explains the game to Dan. In Part B, Dan plays the game. In Part C, Dan and Iris discuss the game.

- Compared to Task 1, this task has a less conventional format. It requires candidates to understand the rules of the game being played.
- One point which is worth mentioning about this task is that it is divided into three parts. Candidates are asked to label the missing information in Part A, put circles in the correct squares in Part B and answer questions in Part C.
- The pace and speed of the recording for task 2 are similar to Task 1's. The answers are mostly straightforward.
- Q17 and Q18 require candidates to understand direction and position. Candidates need to realize the fact that there are two lives for the game.
- Q23–26 are the most challenging questions in Task 2 and require rather lengthy answers. Less able candidates may struggle to spell the words 'document' (Q23 & Q25) and 'locations' (Q26).

Task 3

13 marks

Format: labelling a picture, paragraph completion and proofreading (putting a tick/correcting mistakes/gap-fill/labelling)

Listening for specific information

Listening for keywords and spelling

Summary: There are three parts in this task. Part A involves doing proofreading for Kaity and correcting mistakes. In Part B, candidates are required to label four games children are playing in a painting. In Part C, candidates are required to complete a text.

- The speed of the Task 3 recording is slightly faster than in Tasks 1 and 2.
- The answers are mostly repeated but usually paraphrased. Candidates may find it confusing because there are changes in the wordings when the speakers repeat the answers. For example, the answer for Q36 can be either 'only a few colours' or 'only a small number of colours', and for Q37, it can be either 'very complex pictures' or 'really complicated images'.

- Q38 is a bit tricky as the speaker mentions the phrase ‘not meant to be serious’ before saying the word ‘funny’, which is the correct answer. Careless or less able candidates may just write down ‘serious’ instead of ‘funny’.
- Some candidates may struggle to spell the words ‘complicated’ or ‘complex’ in Q37.

Task 4

12 marks

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

Listening for keywords and information

Listening for attitudes and opinion

Listening for descriptions of cause and effect

Listening for main ideas

Summary: In this task, candidates are required to listen to a conversation between Kaity and two professors of psychology. They are discussing the psychology of game and play.

- Even though a table-completion section has been added, this is basically the same Question–Answer format we have seen in every Task 4 since 2015.
- Most answers require close-to-complete sentences or even complete sentences.
- Q43 requires candidates to identify the attitudes of the speakers and what they disagree about. The answer is repeated a few times and it should be one of the easiest questions in this task.
- The speed of the recording of this task is the fastest, and the topics change swiftly.
- Some answers are not repeated, and many of those that are repeated are quite heavily paraphrased. For example, in Q46, the point ‘escape something that’s trying to eat them’ is changed to ‘escape from predators and hunters’ when it is repeated.
- Q47 and 49 are the most challenging as they require candidates to utilize summarizing and paraphrasing skills.
- The repetition of the answer to Q49 uses the rather advanced ‘deliberately’, which many candidates would likely struggle to spell correctly. In Q50, the word ‘morality’ might be a challenge for less able candidates.

Part B

Situation: You are Sammy Tsang, and work for a board game company called Griffin Workshop in Hong Kong. The company is now working on its latest board game *Escape to Hong Kong Island*, and you have been asked to do some tasks. Candidates listen to a recording of the weekly podcast programme *The Classical*, which includes an interview with Angel Fu and Eric Park, a well-known board game designer.

Part B: Recording/Note-taking sheet

- The recording is of a podcast and there are three speakers (two male and one female).
- The recording is rather long, but the ideas should be reasonably easy for the candidates to manage.
- The recording is slightly faster than the ones for the Part A tasks. The content is probably also a bit harder than in Part A, and at times it can be difficult to tell the two male speakers apart, though this doesn't have much of an impact on the tasks. Both male speakers have American accents.
- The situation has a bit of a thematic link to Part A, as it also deals with games.
- For the first time since 2014, the note-taking sheet doesn't consist of just four basic subheadings, as the third one is divided into two parts. This should make it slightly easier for candidates to focus their attention as they listen.

Part B1: Data File

- There are only seven Data File items this year, which is the lowest number since 2012.
- As has been the case all years except 2015, there are fewer Data File items in Part B1 than in Part B2.
- The total word count of the B1 Data File is still relatively close to the average, though much of this consists of peripheral content such as names, times, dates and email subjects.
- Most of the Data File items are quite familiar. The text types are mostly online materials: emails, forum thread, Skype chat, WhatsApp messages.
- Since most of the Data File items are segmented rather than in the format of lengthy texts, it should be quite easy for the candidates to locate the answers.

Task 5

14 marks

Candidates are asked to complete an application form using information from the Data File and the recording.

- Candidates have to get all the answers from the recording, the Skype chat (DF5) and the email from Tommy Chen (DF6).
- Almost all the answers are very straightforward.
- It seems there are 12 content points, which leaves two marks for language. The answers for Part 1 can be obtained from DF5 (the Skype chat) and DF6 (the email), and the answers for Part 2 can all be found in the recording.
- There should be five people in the company, including Sammy.

Task 6

18 marks

Candidates are asked to write an email to the well-known board game reviewer Paul Achebe using information from the Data File and the recording (120 words).

- Like all years except 2017, this year's Task 6 carries 18 marks.
- Most likely, there are nine content points in this task, each one worth one mark, like in 2017. That makes for a total of nine marks for Task Completion.
- All the points can be found in DF3 (the forum thread), except for the information about how the game is played (the players start in Kowloon and have to reach HK Island; when everybody in the team manages to reach HK Island, they win) as well as the target audience (teenagers), which are in the recording.
- The instructional email says about Ryan Achebe that he 'reviewed our other game last year'. It would of course make sense to remind him of this in the letter, but this doesn't seem to be a content point.
- Several content points from the recording are repeated in the Data File, like last year.
- This task is quite straightforward and fairly easy compared to previous years.
- The level of difficulty is not noticeably higher than that of Task 5.

Task 7

20 marks

Candidates are asked to write a report on the questionnaire results and follow-up actions relating to the game *Escape to Hong Kong Island* using information from the Data File (150 words).

- 20 marks is the highest yet for Task 7. The suggested word count (150 words) is higher than last year's but in line with all the preceding years.
- It seems there are 11 content points and 11 marks for Task Completion, which leaves five marks for language, two marks for coherence and organisation and two marks for appropriacy.
- Candidates have to present the results of the questionnaire (DF4) as well as mention what follow-up actions have been done and which have not (DF7).
- Like in 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 Data File items they need to use.
- It is the first time since 2014 that Task 7 has been the one to require only the Data File and not the recording; it was Task 6 in 2015–2017.

Part B2: Data File

- There are eight Data File items this year, which is the lowest number since 2012.
- The total word count of 1,787 is also the lowest since 2012, and almost 480 words fewer than last year's total. In addition, as with Part B1, the word count is inflated by a lot of peripheral content such as names, times, dates and email subjects.
- As in B1, the Data File text types are all familiar, and mostly from online sources (emails, blog, web pages, Skype chat).
- The focus is very much on highly informal text types and informal language, both in B1 and B2. In some ways, this makes it harder for the candidates as they won't be able to use the content verbatim in the tasks, seeing as the output text types require more formal language.
- Both the B1 and B2 Data Files contain charts and other visual information.
- There is no overlap between B1 and B2 in terms of Data File items.
- The items do not appear in the order candidates need to use them, which is the same as most previous years.

Task 8

22 marks

Candidates are asked to write a funding report for *Escape to Hong Kong Island* using information from the B2 Data File and the recording (220 words).

- A ‘funding report’ is not a text type that has appeared before.
- Like last year, the suggested word count for Task 8 is 220 words, the highest ever.
- This is also the second year in a row that task 8 carries 22 marks, also the highest ever.
- The instructional email asks candidates to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of each funding option, which can be challenging for some candidates. It means that most of the content points cannot be copied directly from the Data File. Candidates really need to understand and digest the information in the Data File.
- In addition to the specific advantages and disadvantages, it seems that some supporting details also need to be included, though this isn’t stated explicitly in the instructional email.

Task 9

13 marks

Candidates are asked to write an email to Crossroads Game Café using information from the B2 Data File (120 words).

- Most likely, there are seven content points in this Task, worth a total of seven Task Completion marks, plus three marks for Language, one mark for Coherence and Organization, and two marks for Appropriacy, like in last year’s Task 10.
- Candidates are not required to use any information from the recording. As with Task 7 in Part B1, it is the first time since 2014 that Task 9 has been the one to require only the Data File; it was Task 10 in 2015–2017.
- Task 9 is much easier than Task 8, requiring candidates to read only two Data File items (DF6 and DF7) in addition to the instructional email (DF2).
- The trickiest content point to be identified for most candidates may be the fact that Eric Park will attend the event.

Task 10

17 marks

Candidates are asked to write an email to Ryan Au giving him feedback on his artwork samples using information from the B2 Data File and the recording (150 words).

- Most likely, there are eight content points for this task, worth a total of eight Task Completion marks, plus a total of nine language marks.
- This task requires candidates to find content points in the recording notes, DF5 (the questionnaire results), DF7 (the Skype chat) and DF11 (the email from Mabel Lau to Angel Fu).
- For many candidates, the hardest thing about this task will probably be working out how to incorporate the recording notes into their answer. The charts in DF5 show that even though the target audience of 12–15-year-olds love the artwork on the cards, their parents do not. In the recording, Eric Park makes it clear that the parents have the final say in whether a game gets bought, and therefore there is a need to change the artwork. The instructional email (DF2) doesn't give an explicit instruction to include this explanation, but it does warn candidates 'not to upset the artist'. Providing this explanation is a natural way to soften the blow.
- Task 10 is more difficult than Task 9 and may be slightly more difficult than Task 8. This is because of the rather complicated link between the content in the recording and the information in the Data File.
- One thing about Task 10 which is not too challenging is the output text type, as all candidates should be familiar with emails.

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
2016	15	16	16	11	58	18	18	18	18	18	18
2017	13	13	15	13	54	17	19	17	22	18	13
2018	13	13	13	12	51	14	18	20	22	13	17
Av	13.9	13.9	15.1	13.4	56	16.4	18.1	18.1	18.1	17.3	17.1

Average number of words per mark in Part A answers

	<i>Task 1</i>	<i>Task 2</i>	<i>Task 3</i>	<i>Task 4</i>	<i>Total (av.)</i>
2012	1.4 (18/13)	1.8 (23/13)	2.3 (32/14)	1.6 (21/13)	1.78
2013	2 (28/14)	4.7 (28/6)	1.2 (11/9)	2.1 (34/16)	2.5
2014	1.1 (13/12)	1.4 (21/15)	1.7 (26/15)	2.1 (37/18)	1.58
2015	1.7 (29/17)	2 (28/14)	3.2 (51/16)	5.5 (61/11)	3.1
2016	2.1 (31/15)	1.88 (30/16)	2.38 (38/16)	4.6 (51/11)	2.74
2017	1.85 (24/13)	3.15 (41/13)	5 (75/15)	6.15 (80/13)	4.04
2018	2.85(37/13)	4.23 (55/13)	2(26/13)	6.67(80/12)	3.94
Av	1.86	2.74	2.54	4.1	2.81

Content points in Tasks 6–10

	<i>Task 5</i>		<i>Task 6</i>		<i>Task 7</i>		<i>Task 8</i>		<i>Task 9</i>		<i>Task 10</i>	
	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>CPs</i>	
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	
2017	13	10	10	8	8	13	13	9	9	7	7	
2018	12	9	9	11	11	13	13*	7	7*	8	8*	
Av	14.4	9.1	9.7	9.1	12	10.1	12.9	8.7	10.1	8.6	11	

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
2017	815	572	780	932	1190	4289
2018	593	776	807	709	1088	3973
Av	697.1	726.3	760	769.3	1071.7	4024.4

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
2017	8	1366	10	2280
2018	7	1224	8	1787
Av	7.9	1282.4	9.1	1939

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
2017	–	120	120	220	150	100
2018	–	120	150	220	120	150
Av	–	120	145.7	161.4	152.9	178.6