

ATTENTION

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HKDSE English Language Exam Analysis Report 2019 (Papers 1–3)

The BEST way to achieve EXCELLENCE

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2019 HKDSE · Paper 1 (Reading)

Reading Passages

Part A

Part A comprises one interview article (Text 1) where the interviewee, Tim Harford, explains the ‘new look at messiness’ that he discusses in his recent book.

Number of passages: The 2019 paper has one Part A passage only. Prior to this year, there had been four papers with one Part A passage (2012, 2013, 2014 and 2017) and three papers with two Part A passages (2015, 2016 and 2018). The current trend—at least what one can observe from 2016 to 2019—is that the number of Part A passages alternates. In 2017 and 2019, Part A consists of one long passage each, whereas in 2016 and 2018, Part A consists of one shorter passage (a listicle in 2016 and some classified advertisements in 2018) followed by a longer passage with a similar theme.

Text type: The sole Part A passage this year is an interview article with an author. The same text type appeared in 2015 when candidates had to read an interview article of a Western author living in South Korea. Interview articles should be manageable since they follow a question-and-answer format and the questions can assist candidates in their reading.

Topic: The choice of an article on the benefits of messiness continues the recent trend of selecting passages that are familiar and relevant to the average candidate in Part A. Part A in 2017 is about why recycling may not be worthwhile whereas that in 2018 is on whether or not music helps people focus. The interviewee in the 2019 Part A passage suggests that mess—which includes improvisation, distraction, ambiguity, imperfection and the like—can have a positive impact on work efficiency. This proposition should be interesting to candidates, many of whom have been reluctant to get organized despite repeated calls from parents and teachers alike.

Level of difficulty: The passage is generally easy to read since, as mentioned, the topic is familiar and the questions help candidates orient themselves. While there are a few relatively advanced vocabulary items (e.g. ‘improvisation’, ‘unquantifiable’ and ‘dysfunctional’) here and there, it should not be too difficult for candidates to infer their meaning based on their understanding of the entire text.

Part B1

Part B1 comprises a web page (Text 2) promoting three activities organized by Hong Kong Public Libraries, a news report on a decline in ‘culture of reading’ (Text 3) and a letter to the editor (Text 4) suggesting how a reading culture may be developed at home, at school and in the community.

Number of passages: There are three passages in Part B1 this year, compared to two in 2018. Judging from what we have seen in all HKDSE papers except for the first one (2012), the tendency is to have multiple passages in Part B1 to make the tasks less daunting to less able candidates.

Text type: The passages that appear in this year’s Part B1 all belong to common text types. Even though this is the first time that a web page has appeared in an HKDSE reading paper, web pages should not be unfamiliar to candidates.

Topic: All three passages deal with reading in Hong Kong. This topic is arguably the most accessible one chosen for Part B1 in recent years. After years of schooling, candidates should (hopefully) have obtained a good understanding of the benefits of reading, the importance of a reading culture and how to make good use of public library resources. For instance, Part B1 in 2018 is about bees—beekeeping in Hong Kong and how to handle bee stings. While these are not obscure topics, there are definitely more candidates who have visited a library than those who have been stung by a bee.

Level of difficulty: 2019 HKDSE candidates who attempted Part B1 should have had a good experience in the examination hall. While there are no sub-headings in Texts 3 and 4, both passages are easy to follow. A case in point is Text 4, the letter to the editor, which discusses how a reading culture can be developed at home, at school and in the wider community in separate paragraphs. Certain expressions, e.g. ‘capitalising on

technology', 'reignite the passion' and 'avid readers', may be puzzling to the less able students, but they are either irrelevant to the answers or can be understood from the context reasonably easily.

Part B2

Part B2 comprises an excerpt from an autobiography (Text 5). The Australian author recounts his experience trying to get rid of his 'teacher's pet image' by running away from home and misbehaving in class when he was in primary school. Unlike in 2016, 2017 and 2018, Parts B1 and B2 are not thematically linked.

Number of passages: Part B2 in 2019 is similar to that in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017 in that there is only one passage. It was noted earlier that the number of reading passages in Part A from 2016 to 2019 exhibits an 'alternating' pattern; a similar trend can be observed in Part B2. Part B2 in 2015, 2017 and 2019 is based on one passage whereas that in 2016 and 2018 is based on two or three passages.

Text type: The passage is an excerpt from an autobiography. This text type also appeared in the 2014 paper, where candidates have to read an excerpt from the autobiography of Stephen Fry. It could be difficult to even the more able candidates, since few read narrative non-fiction, let alone (auto)biographical material, in English. Given that Text 6 in Part B2 of the 2018 paper is of a similar style, it would be wise for students to expose themselves to writing of this sort.

Topic: Mischief at school and at home is the main focus of this excerpt and candidates should have no trouble understanding it. Caning ('he gave me his full four strokes', etc.) could appear foreign to many. As usual, candidates should be prepared to handle topics that they are less familiar with in Part B2, such as dystopian literature (2013), the unhealthy desire for fame (2014), liberal arts education in the United States (2015) and beekeeping practices (2018).

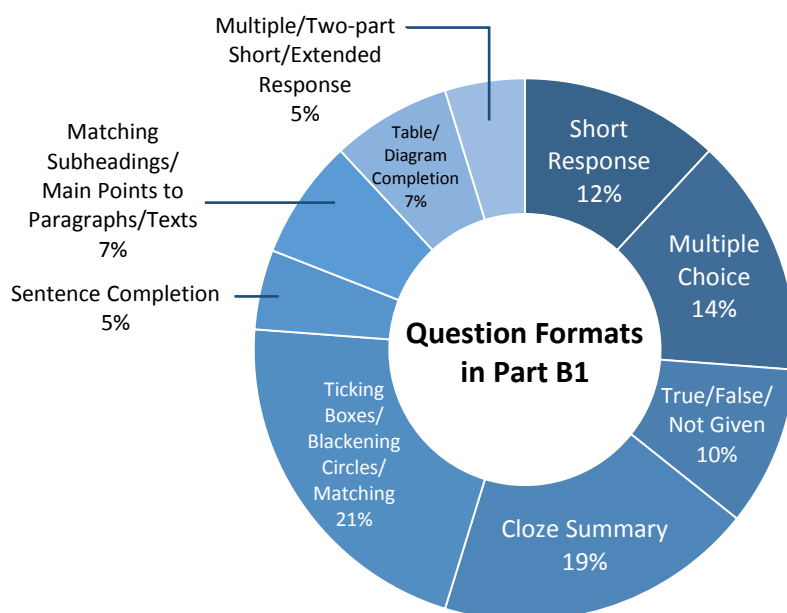
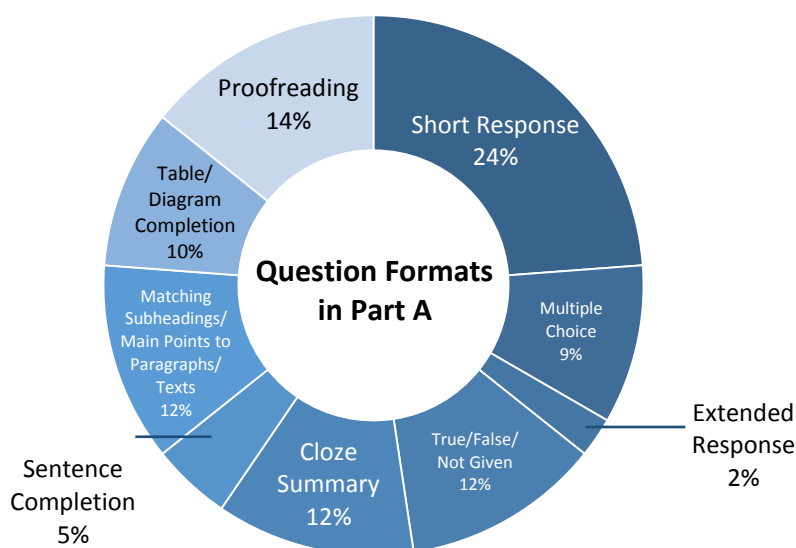
Level of difficulty: The Part B2 passage is reasonably challenging. There are quite a lot of advanced vocabulary items and certain sentences are rather dense, e.g. 'One is what one is, and if one isn't very nice or good, then it brings some solace to remember that other men have been worse. At various times in my life I have tried to pose as a thug, but the imposture has always collapsed of its own accord.' To fully understand the passage and the author's humour, candidates have to be very proficient users of English. For example, the author described two neighbours who talked to each other non-stop across the back fence as being engaged in an 'unbeatable lunch-to-sunset epic'. The humour would almost certainly be beyond those who do not know what an epic is.

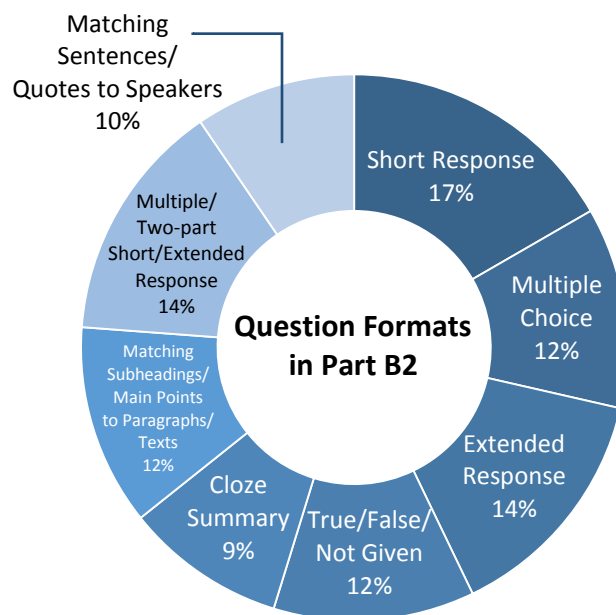
Question Formats

As expected, the 2019 reading paper is comprised mainly of short response and multiple-choice questions. Part B2, being the most difficult section, naturally contains the greatest number of extended response questions, a format that is entirely absent from Part B1, the easiest section. There are quite a lot of True/False/Not Given questions this year (a total of 9 marks if Part B1 is attempted and 10 marks if Part B2 is attempted). A number of rather easy questions that require candidates to tick boxes or blacken circles are included in this year's Part B1. While cloze summary questions still take up a sizeable proportion of the marks, they have become much easier since the instructions specify that students should fill in the blanks using words that can be found in specific paragraphs. This means that they do not have to worry about parts of speech and other grammatical issues. Last but not least, there is a relatively rare proofreading question in Part A.

Question Format	Part A [42]	Part B1 [42]	Part B2 [42]
Short Response	Q2, Q6, Q7, Q9 [5], Q11, Q13	Q25, Q31, Q35, Q37, Q40	Q43, Q45, Q47, Q50, Q52, Q55, Q59
Multiple Choice	Q3, Q10, Q14, Q17	Q19, Q23, Q29, Q30, Q32, Q34	Q42, Q54, Q58, Q60, Q63
Extended Response	Q15	-	Q44, Q48, Q49, Q57, Q61, Q66
True/False/Not Given	Q1 [5]	Q20 [3], Q33	Q46 [5]

Cloze Summary	Q8 [5]	Q24 [3], Q26 [5]	Q56 [4]
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	-	Q21, Q22 [4], Q27 [4]	-
Sentence Completion	Q5, Q12	Q28, Q36	-
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	Q18 [5]	Q41 [3]	Q64 [5]
Labelling Pictures	-	-	-
Table/Diagram Completion	Q16 [4]	Q38 [3]	-
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	-	Q39 [2]	Q51 [2], Q53 [2], Q62 [2]
Sequencing	-	-	-
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	-	-	Q65 [4]
Proofreading	Q4 [6]	-	-
Timeline Completion	-	-	-

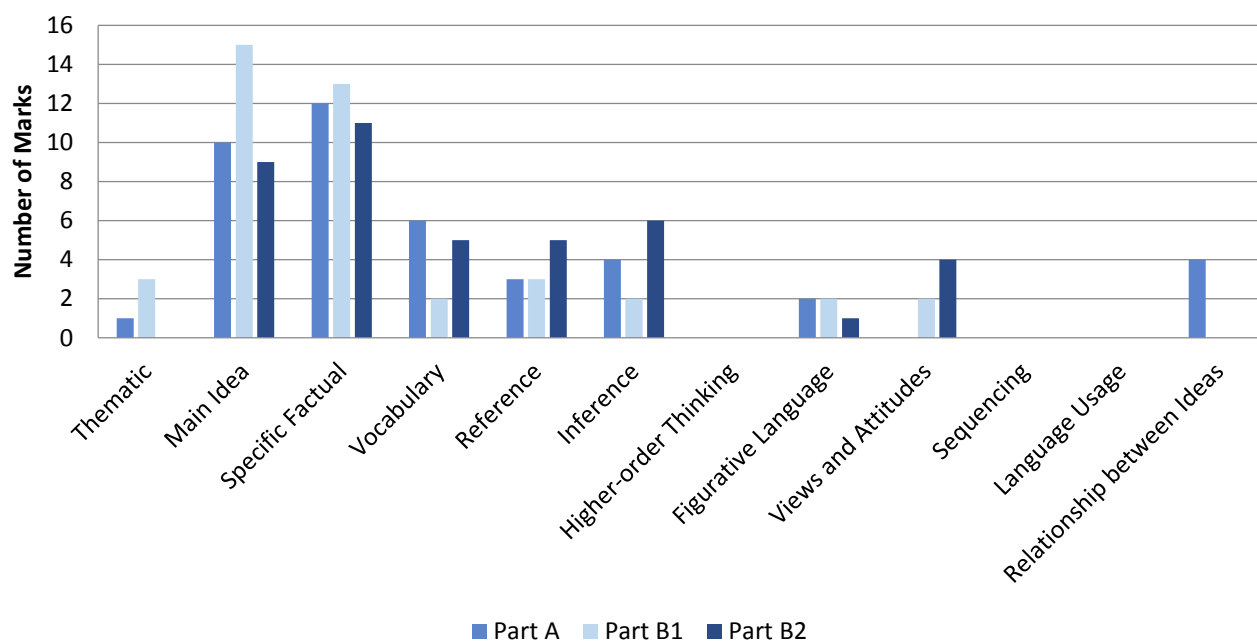




Question Types

Specific factual, main idea, inference, vocabulary and reference questions remain the most common types of questions to appear in the reading paper. The difference in the levels of difficulty of Parts B1 and B2 is again manifested in the number of inference questions—two in Part B1 and six in Part B2.

HKDSE 2019 Paper 1 Question Types



Question Type	Part A [42]	Part B1 [42]	Part B2 [42]
Thematic	Q17	Q41 [3]	-
Main Idea	Q8 [5], Q18 [5]	Q22 [4], Q24 [3], Q26 [5], Q38 [3]	Q56 [4], Q64 [5]
Specific Factual	Q1 [5], Q4 [6], Q12	Q19, Q20 [3], Q21, Q25, Q27 [4], Q29, Q30, Q33	Q44, Q46 [5], Q51 [2], Q54, Q60, Q63
Vocabulary	Q6, Q9 [5]	Q23, Q35	Q42, Q45, Q55, Q62 [2]
Reference	Q2, Q7, Q13	Q31, Q32, Q40	Q43, Q52, Q53 [2], Q59
Inference	Q3, Q5, Q14, Q15	Q28, Q36	Q47, Q48, Q49, Q58, Q61, Q66
Higher-order Thinking	-	-	-
Figurative Language	Q10, Q11	Q34, Q37	Q50
Views and Attitudes	-	Q39 [2]	Q57, Q65 [4]
Sequencing	-	-	-
Language Usage	-	-	-
Relationship between Ideas	Q16 [4]	-	-

Noteworthy Questions and Recommendations

Part A

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
2	This is a reference question that specifies the referent and requires candidates to find a phrase that refers to that referent. All reference questions in past HKDSE papers work the other way round: a pronoun or phrase is given and candidates have to identify the referent.	Students should be trained to do reference questions both ways, that is, they should not only be asked to identify the referent denoted by a pronoun or phrase but should also try to be given the referent and asked to find the phrase that refers to that referent.
4	This is a proofreading question. Prior to the 2019 examination, there had only been one such question and it is in Part B2 of the 2015 paper. While this question format might strike candidates as unfamiliar, the question itself is actually very easy since it involves correcting mistakes in content, not in language. It is designed in such a way that if a student is able to find the mistake, he/she only has to replace the wrong word with its antonym to get the mark. For example, in Q4ii and Q4iii, candidates should change 'can' to 'cannot' and 'calm' to 'anxious' respectively. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to say that HKALE or pre-2007 HKCEE proofreading questions (which test candidates' grammar knowledge) have made a comeback.	Despite the fact that proofreading questions in the HKDSE involve content errors only, assigning HKALE and/or HKCEE past papers to familiarize students with the format certainly does no harm.
5	This is an inference question that tests candidates' general language awareness. Candidates have to explain why the word 'Messy' has a capital letter. The answer is, of course, that 'Messy' is the name of a book or a proper noun.	Students should be made aware of the nuances of capitalization and punctuation. For example, they can be asked to explain why the author has used capital letters or quotation marks.

6, 9	These are vocabulary questions that require candidates to find words that have a similar meaning to given words or phrases. They take up a total of six marks.	Students should be taught to look for words of the same part of speech and with the same grammatical properties to avoid losing marks.
8, 16	Q8 is a main idea question set in the cloze summary format while Q16 is a relationship between ideas question set in the table/diagram completion format. The questions are similar as candidates are required to fill in each blank with one word that can be found in specific paragraphs of the passage. They need not (or rather, cannot) supply their own answers.	Students must be reminded to pay due attention to the instructions when they have to fill in the blanks. They cannot afford to waste time coming up with their own words if the question has already specified that all answers should come from the passage.
11	This is a figurative language question that is potentially challenging. Less able candidates may be unfamiliar with the 'baggage' metaphor denoting negative influences, feelings, etc. that one carries around.	-
18	This is a main idea question. While it looks very different from what candidates are used to seeing, it is not a particularly difficult question. Candidates simply have to match the main ideas to paragraphs. The only difference lies in the fact that the main ideas are not given as statements but mentioned in a conversation between two 'friends'.	-

Part B1

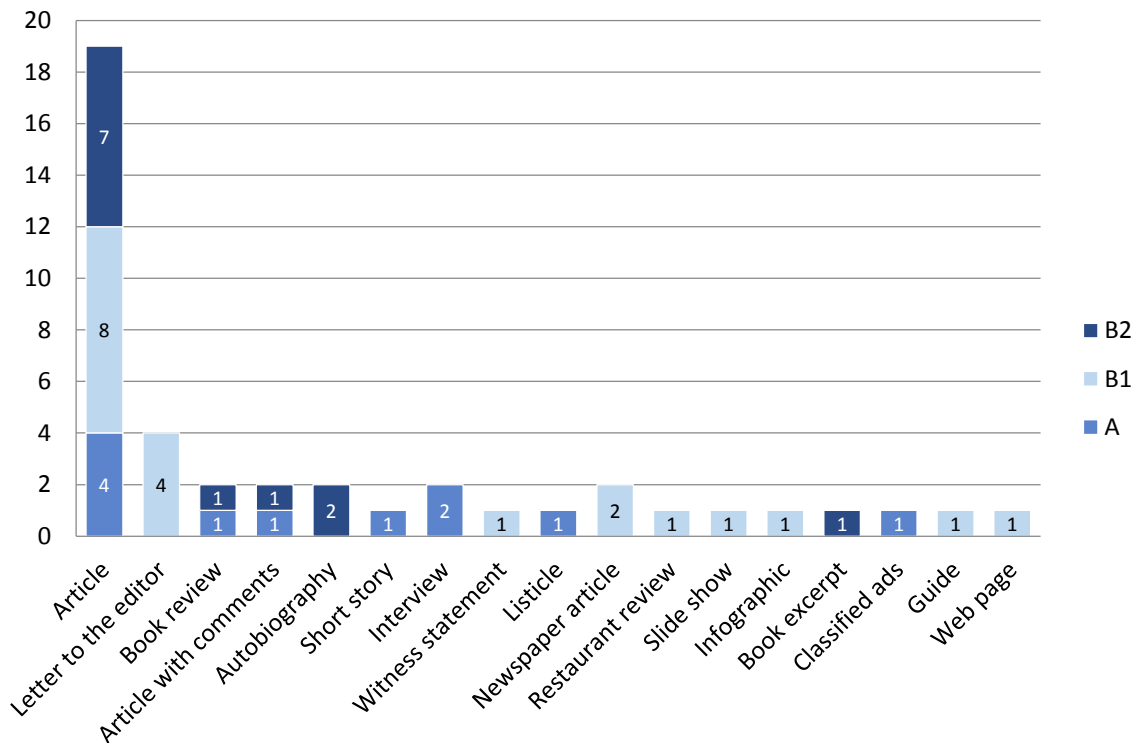
Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
24, 26, 38	These are main idea questions that require candidates to fill in each blank with a word or phrase that can be found in specific paragraphs of a passage. They need not (or rather, cannot) supply their own answers.	See Part A Q8/Q16. Again, candidates must pay attention to the instructions as it is stated in Q26 that the answer can be a word or a phrase, meaning that more than one word may be used.
32	This is a reference question. The multiple-choice format makes it easier than it could have been. Candidates have to understand the points made by different people mentioned in the passage and infer who the advisor referred to in the title actually is.	-
35	This is a vocabulary question. Instead of asking candidates to find a word that has a similar meaning to a given expression, they have to identify a word that serves a particular purpose—in this case, a word that highlights the writer's confidence in his claim. Similar questions can also be found in the 2018 paper (Part A Q8 and Part B2 Q46).	To prepare less able students for this kind of vocabulary questions, they can be asked to explain the effect of particular words or expressions in a passage.
37	This is a figurative language question. Candidates have to explain what the 'nightly adventures' are. While the answer, 'bedtime reading', can be found in the same paragraph, less able candidates may be unable to make sense of the comparison between the reading process and an adventure.	-
39	This is a views and attitudes question. As this is one of the last questions in Part B1, candidates may expect to find the answer in the last paragraph. Indeed, many possible answers to Q39i (how technology is a friend to reading) can be extracted from the last paragraph; but the reason why technology can be an enemy to reading is actually in paragraph 2.	Students ought to be reminded that questions towards the end of a part (A, B1 or B2) may require them to demonstrate an understanding of the entire passage.

Part B2

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
43	This is a reference question asking candidates to identify what 'the treatment' refers to. The answer, 'caning', is not explicitly given in the paragraph, even though such expressions as 'impart up to four strokes of the cane' and 'the six strokes' can be found. The question is made even more difficult by the fact that caning is likely to be a foreign concept to most.	-
45	This is a vocabulary question that requires candidates to find a word with a similar meaning to 'unfortunately'. Some might be inclined to put down a word ending with -ly as the answer, but the correct answer is 'alas'.	cf. Part A Q6/Q9 More able students should be aware that they may have to take a more flexible approach to deal with vocabulary questions.
49	This is an inference question. Candidates need to know that the author detests the teacher's pet label and make a sensible guess as to why supplying the correct answer is undesirable—probably because the despicable label would stick.	Students should be reminded that the answer to certain challenging questions will not be available in the text and that informed guesses will have to be made.
50	This is a figurative language question. While what the fragments represent is not explicitly given, the author does say that those fragments can be found in the 'network of railway tracks' on top of each desk and pushed with 'chuffing noises', both of which hint that they are 'trains'.	More able students should be trained in identifying and explaining metaphors in a contextualized fashion.
52	This is a reference question. To identify whose eyes are being referred to in 'Eyes turned towards me', candidates have to consider where the author was when the incident occurred. Since he was in the classroom, the 'eyes' were obviously his classmates'.	Such challenging reference questions can be handled if students think carefully about the role of the person making the remark and how he is related to other people.
57	This is a views and attitudes question which requires candidates to explain whether the writer's second attempt at running away from home was a success or a failure. The author 'got all the way to' somewhere 'more than two hundred yards from home' and 'did [his] escaping symbolically'. These might mislead less able candidates into thinking that the attempt was a success.	Passages involving self-deprecating humour can be discussed with more able students as that is an important feature in both the 2014 and 2019 Part B2 reading passages.
63	This is a specific factual question. Candidates are expected to locate information from multiple paragraphs and form an overall impression of the author. Slower candidates who tend to run out of time may find this question challenging since the answer cannot be found in the last paragraph.	See Part B1 Q39
64	This is a main idea question where candidates have to match summary headings to paragraphs. The format itself is familiar to most candidates but some of the words used in the headings, e.g. 'token' as in 'token gestures' and 'dilemma', may not be.	-

HKDSE Paper 1 Statistics (2012–2019)

Text types



Word counts of reading passages

Year	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)
2019	1088	971 (170 + 421 + 380)	1163
Average	1035	900	1137

Number of Questions/Marks

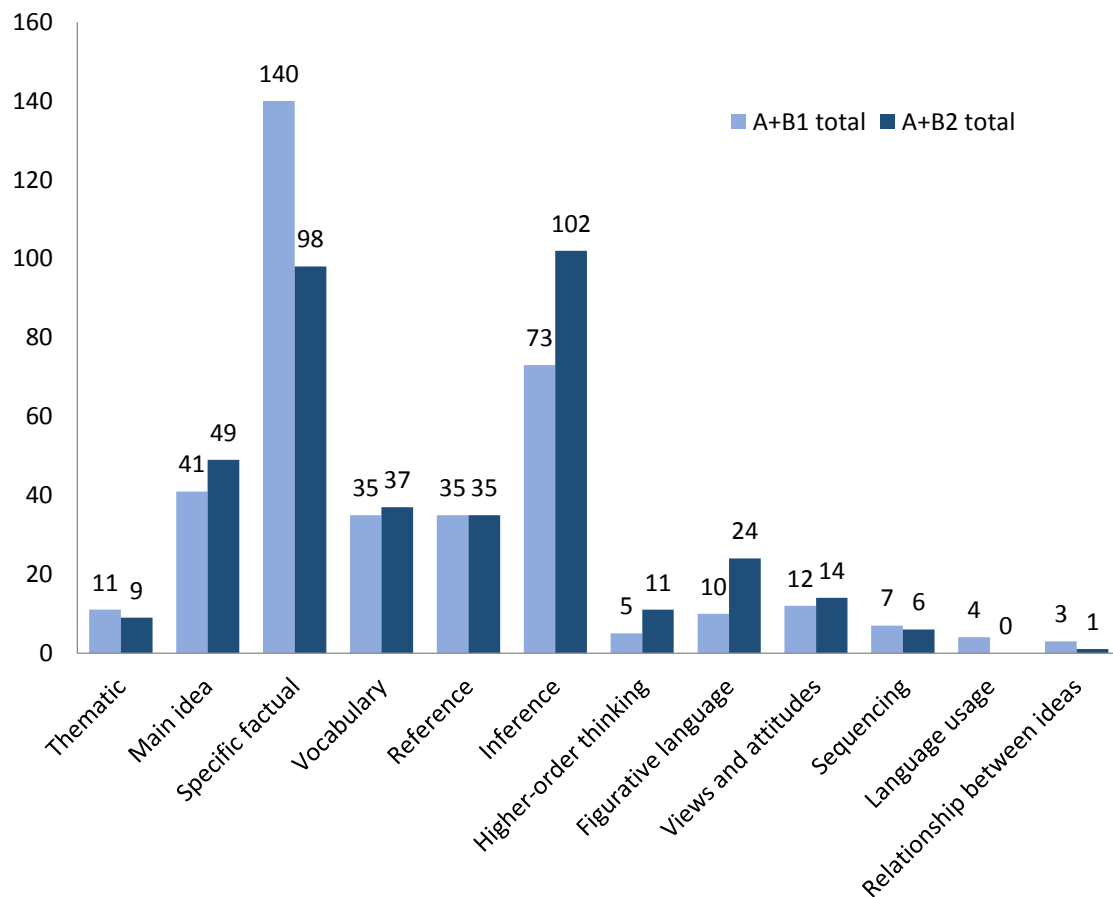
Year	Part A		Part B1		Part B2	
	Questions	Marks	Questions	Marks	Questions	Marks
2012	20	47	20	45	33	46
2013	25	41	20	41	20	41
2014	30	47	29	41	25	41
2015	31	40	24	40	22	40
2016	18	41	28	43	29	43
2017	21	41	22	43	15	43
2018	22	42	23	42	26	42
2019	18	42	23	42	25	42
Average	23	43	24	42	24	42

Question Formats

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Short Response	10 (A+B1)	13 (A+B1)	26 (A+B1)	30 (A+B1)	13 (A+B1)	12 (A+B1)	14 (A+B1)	11 (A+B1)
	17 (A+B2)	11 (A+B2)	26 (A+B2)	24 (A+B2)	17 (A+B2)	6 (A+B2)	17 (A+B2)	13 (A+B2)
Multiple Choice	11 (A+B1)	9 (A+B1)	11 (A+B1)	7 (A+B1)	13 (A+B1)	13 (A+B1)	11 (A+B1)	10 (A+B1)
	15 (A+B2)	11 (A+B2)	11 (A+B2)	6 (A+B2)	13 (A+B2)	9 (A+B2)	11 (A+B2)	9 (A+B2)
Extended Response	1 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)	5 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	6 (A+B1)	7 (A+B1)	7 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)
	9 (A+B2)	7 (A+B2)	4 (A+B2)	5 (A+B2)	7 (A+B2)	7 (A+B2)	9 (A+B2)	6 (A+B2)
True/False/Not Given	2 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)
	2 (A+B2)	3 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)
Cloze Summary	2 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)
	2 (A+B2)	4 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	5 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	1 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)
	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)
Sentence Completion	3 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	4 (A+B1)
	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)
	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)
Labelling Pictures	1 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)
	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)
Table/Diagram Completion	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)
	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	4 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	5 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)
	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	6 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	3 (A+B2)
Sequencing	2 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	2 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)
	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	2 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)
	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)
Proofreading	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	1 (A+B1)
	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)
Timeline Completion	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	3 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)	0 (A+B1)
	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	3 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B2)

Question Types

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Thematic	2 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	3 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)
Main Idea	6 (A+B1) 9 (A+B2)	3 (A+B1) 6 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	12 (A+B1) 13 (A+B2)	7 (A+B1) 8 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 4 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 4 (A+B2)
Specific Factual	13 (A+B1) 10 (A+B2)	21 (A+B1) 14 (A+B2)	28 (A+B1) 20 (A+B2)	10 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	17 (A+B1) 13 (A+B2)	25 (A+B1) 21 (A+B2)	15 (A+B1) 8 (A+B2)	11 (A+B1) 9 (A+B2)
Vocabulary	4 (A+B1) 8 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 5 (A+B2)	3 (A+B1) 5 (A+B2)	8 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 8 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 6 (A+B2)
Reference	3 (A+B1) 4 (A+B2)	3 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 9 (A+B2)	5 (A+B1) 5 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 4 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 7 (A+B2)
Inference	10 (A+B1) 14 (A+B2)	12 (A+B1) 12 (A+B2)	16 (A+B1) 18 (A+B2)	12 (A+B1) 13 (A+B2)	7 (A+B1) 12 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 9 (A+B2)	8 (A+B1) 14 (A+B2)	6 (A+B1) 10 (A+B2)
Higher-order Thinking	0 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)
Figurative Language	0 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 7 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)
Views and Attitudes	1 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	4 (A+B1) 5 (A+B2)	5 (A+B1) 3 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)
Sequencing	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 2 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)
Language Usage	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	2 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)
Relationship between Ideas	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	0 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 0 (A+B2)	1 (A+B1) 1 (A+B2)



Reading Levels

	Part A		Part B1		Part B2	
Year	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	46.95 (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	48.45 (40.3; 56.6)	9.95 (10.3; 9.6)	62.3 (69.3; 55.3)	9.97 (8.88; 11.06)	68.45 (59.8; 77.1)	8.56 (9.64; 7.48)
2019	67.4	7.5	49.9 (49.8; 43.3; 55.6)	11.3 (10.6; 13.3; 9.9)	70	7.5
Average	63.56	9.55	61.51	9.50	56.85	10.33

2019 HKDSE · Paper 2 (Writing)

Part A (Question 1)

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
1	Yearbook entry	A Secondary 6 student	Other Secondary 6 students	Informal

This is the first time that students have been asked to write a yearbook entry in the HKDSE writing paper. Despite this, the task should be manageable to most since it involves recounting experiences at school. Clear prompts—‘Write about one subject that you enjoyed studying or found challenging’ and ‘Write about what you will miss most about being a student in class 6C’—mean that students are unlikely to go off topic.

Part A General Recommendations

So far, in the HKDSE, Part A questions tend to require students to exercise their creativity and talk about personal experiences. Examples include:

2012: Candidates assume the role of a news reporter and write about the best part of their job, the biggest challenge they have faced in their job, etc.

2013: Candidates describe two photos that they have taken and explain why they are meaningful to them

2014: Candidates write a short article about a hypothetical village

2016: Candidates assume the role of the President of the Students’ Association and discuss the importance of following school rules and maintaining good interpersonal relationships

2019: See above

The emphasis on recounting experiences probably has to do with the fact that a majority of candidates prefer to attempt formal expository questions in Part B and may not feel comfortable writing something informal and personal. To better prepare students for Part A, teachers might want to provide more opportunities for students to write about their school life, family, etc. in class and encourage them to include personal experiences even when writing longer argumentative essays, debate speeches, letters to the editor and the like.

Part B

The most noticeable difference between the 2019 paper and all the previous HKDSE papers is that the instructions are now given in bullet points. However, this is more a change in form than a change in substance. The amount of guidance provided by the instructions remains more or less the same.

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
2	Essay	A student	The English teacher	Formal
3	Essay	Not specified	Readers of the Hong Kong Daily Press	Formal
4	News report	A correspondent	Readers of the Young Post	Semi-formal
5	Article	Not specified (presumably a student or a young person)	Readers of the Young Post	Semi-formal
6	Film review	A correspondent	Readers of the Young Post	Semi-formal
7	Speech	The leader of a school club	Members of the school club	Semi-formal or informal
8	Email	A volunteer in the district council office	The district council election committee	Formal
9	Short story	Not specified	Judges of the short story contest	Not applicable

Question 2: Social Issues

This question requires candidates to write an essay outlining the benefits and challenges international talent brings to Hong Kong society and discussing ways to ensure that people from the local community are not neglected. While the structure of the essay has been laid out clearly and most candidates should be familiar with the text type, this question could be rather challenging.

- The prompt (the excerpt from a newspaper article) is about corporations hiring international talent. As candidates have yet to join the workforce, they may be oblivious to the impact of foreigners on the job market. Even if they are able to put forward such generic points as ‘enhanced global vision’ and ‘increased competition’, they may not have the knowledge to elaborate on their ideas convincingly.
- It is specified in the instructions that candidates should explain the benefits and challenges brought to *Hong Kong society* by international talent. If they neglect that requirement and provide a general discussion, they cannot expect to obtain a satisfactory score.

Question 3: Debating

This question requires candidates to write an argumentative essay in which they explain why they think social media platforms encourage or stifle public debate. Debate speech questions were set in 2017 and 2018 under this elective module so this text type might be surprising to some. Most candidates are active on social media and they should have a lot to say about whether such platforms have a positive or a negative impact on the quality of public debate. Those who wish to do well should provide personal experiences to support their arguments.

Question 4: Sports Communication

There is some novelty in this question for HKDSE candidates as they had never been asked to write a news report prior to 2019. Compared to the other questions, candidates have more freedom as they can choose to write about whatever sport and whatever incident they find suitable, provided that it is ‘something unexpected’. The biggest challenge is likely to be adhering to the conventions of a news report. Those who do not read English newspapers regularly may be unaware that the first paragraph should provide a summary of the events and that more important content should appear first. They may report on the events from start to finish and score a very low mark in the ‘organization’ domain.

Question 5: Popular Culture

This question is also new as candidates are instructed to write about one or two ‘areas of pop culture’ chosen from the given five, e.g. ‘TV and movies’, ‘music and concerts’. Not only do they have to say where they usually get information about these trends, they also have to name the sources that they recommend. Candidates who watch videos and follow social media pages in English arguably have an advantage. While the question does not expressly discourage candidates from recommending Chinese or other non-English sources of information, this is an English writing exam after all. They can demonstrate a good knowledge of the elective module by providing the names of English magazines, YouTubers broadcasting in English, etc.

Question 6: Drama

This is the first time that a film review question has appeared in the HKDSE. Candidates are required to review a new version of *Cinderella*. The instructions are very clear—a plot summary, a description of the portrayal of the characters and the director’s intentions have to be included. However, this is probably one of the least popular questions in 2019 for the following reasons.

- Not all candidates are familiar with the film *Cinderella*. Attempting this question without a good knowledge of the film is akin to giving up on this part of the paper.
- Few local candidates have the habit of reading film reviews in English. Most are unfamiliar with the conventions of the genre.

Question 7: Poems and Songs

This question requires candidates to take up the role of the chairperson of an after-school arts club and write a speech to their club members about ‘criticism’. It is quite similar to the ‘Drama’ question (Q3) from the 2014 paper in terms of the role and target audience requirements. The situation is relevant to candidates’ daily lives but scoring high could be difficult for those who overlook these key aspects:

- The speech is written by a club chairperson to his/her club members. There is indeed a hierarchy in any school club but the role of a club chairperson is different from that of a boss. A club chairperson

should not lecture his/her fellow students. The points should be presented as suggestions, not commands, even if one decides to mention certain unhappy incidents related to criticism that have happened before (as suggested by the quote from Taylor Swift provided by the question prompt).

- Candidates have to be specific when discussing ways to give and respond to criticism. Concrete examples and/or past experiences should be incorporated into the suggestions. To do this well, candidates will probably have to provide some details as to what the arts club does and link their ideas to the club activities.

Question 8: Workplace Communication

This question revolves around a graphical prompt in the form of campaign posters for a district council candidate. Pictures have appeared alongside some HKDSE writing questions since 2017 but never have candidates been asked to interpret them and explain their effects at length. The requirement to come up with and describe one more design makes the question even more formidable. The context of an election may also be foreign to most candidates who are not voters and have no relevant experience.

Question 9: Short Stories

As usual, the ‘short stories’ question requires candidates to write a short story. However, the 2019 question marks a departure from previous ones in that candidates are not only provided with a picture or a short text on which to base their writing. Candidates have to rewrite *The Tortoise and the Hare* in a very specific way—the tortoise and the hare are now on the same team racing against other contestants. While rewriting a fable may be a new experience, this question should not be overly challenging to the more able candidates who are interested in the ‘Short Stories’ module as the fable is familiar and many might already have come across some ‘alternative’ versions of it.

Part B General Recommendations

Part B in 2019, in many ways, is very different from that in the previous years. To ensure that students are well-prepared for the upcoming examinations, teachers might want to note the following:

- Exposure to print and audio-visual materials in English, as well as Western culture in general, is taking on ever-greater importance. For example, to do well in Q5 and Q6, students need to be familiar with films, music, etc. in English. How a news report (Q4) or a film review (Q6) should be written can only be learnt when there is relevant input.
- The conspicuous absence of letters to the editor (since 2018) and letters to the Principal (since 2016) is notable.
- As mentioned in the recommendations for Part A, even if students are interested in expository writing, they should be made to narrate personal experiences whenever possible. Q3 on the role social media plays in public debate invites students to provide examples from their daily lives. Q5 is quite personal because students have to discuss their preferences when it comes to getting information about popular culture.

2019 HKDSE · Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills)

Part A

As expected, Part A consists of four short listening tasks. For the first time since 2014, candidates are presented with a school-life situation. The focus is on the school IT Club this time. The familiar context means that the paper should be more accessible to the average candidate, compared to the workplace situations in 2015 (Hong Kong Cultural Arts Foundation) and 2018 (an online magazine), for example.

Task 1

Task 1 is the easiest task in Part A. Candidates listen to a meeting between a student, a teacher and the Principal about the school's mobile phone policy. The context is certainly familiar to everybody. Question formats include gap-filling and ticking boxes. All answers are straightforward and only one (Q14) requires candidates to write more than two words.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
4	This question requires candidates to write down the total number of students who responded to the survey. The answer, '214', could be misheard as '240' by some less able candidates.	Less able students should be trained to listen for numbers accurately.

Task 2

Task 2, while slightly more challenging than Task 1, remains manageable. Candidates listen to a meeting among three IT Club members who discuss a new app called 'Mentor Mine'. All questions involve gap-filling.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
21	The answer, 'Italy', is not given explicitly on the recording. Instead, there are such expressions as 'Italian schools' and 'Italian teenagers' and candidates are expected to change 'Italian' to 'Italy' as the name of the country is needed.	Students should pay attention to the given headings or prompts and change the form of words they hear in the recording whenever necessary so that the answer is grammatically correct.
23, 25	The prompt of Q23 uses the phrase 'time limit' but 'a maximum of...' is used on the recording. Q25 requires candidates to complete a reason starting with 'to show'. On the recording, the answer appears after 'it's useful for other students to know...', meaning that the same concept is described from a different perspective.	Students should not expect to hear the exact same words that appear in the Question-Answer Book on the recording. They have to be flexible and make sense of the conversation.

Task 3

Stronger candidates should find Task 3 to be pitched at the right level of difficulty but the weaker ones may feel that things are starting to get out of hand here. The conversation is about 'Youth Boost Centres' in South Africa, which use a form of virtual money. While the speed of the recording is reasonable, some of the questions (e.g. Question 37) require longer answers and the information is seldom repeated, unlike in Tasks 1 and 2.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
36, 40	The expressions that constitute the answers, 'sense of belonging' (Question 36) and 'vulnerable' (Question 40), may be unfamiliar to the less able candidates.	-

Task 4

Task 4 is the most difficult task in Part A. Even the strongest candidates might struggle if they do not take notes before completing or tidying up their answers. Candidates listen to an interview of a computer specialist who talks about the NGO that he works for. As has been the norm since 2015, this task is set in the question-and-answer format. It is explicitly stated that candidates need not write in complete sentences, but that does not make the task any easier since all questions involve note-taking and require long answers. The information is delivered at natural speed and there is almost no repetition.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
46	Q46 is probably the toughest item in the entire paper as the answer is given before the cue words appear on the recording. The interviewer mentions that AR is probably a new concept and the interviewee gives the example of people who have never used a computer. All these happen before the interviewee says that training is an 'essential' part of the process (i.e. 'important' in the question prompt).	Students should not overly rely on the cue words, especially in Task 4. In natural conversations, causes and effects can be described in any order. As cue words may appear before or after the answer, students should always be taking notes in the margins.
48, 52	The expressions 'flash floods' (Question 48) and 'deteriorated' (Question 52) may be unfamiliar to some candidates.	-
49	Irrelevant information—'the children who used the route gave us important information'—appears between signposting ('Plus one special thing about this project') and the answer, i.e. 'the area had a problem with a lot of dangerous pests'.	Students should be taught to follow the flow of a conversation carefully and avoid distractors, i.e. irrelevant information that can get in the way.

Part B

Part B, like Part A, presents candidates with a school-life situation. Candidates assume the role of Nico Lin, the Secretary for the Inter-School Visual Media Society, and are assigned several tasks by the teacher-in-charge. This is different from most of the previous HKDSE papers in which a workplace context is provided. Parts B1 and B2 consist of three tasks each and it appears that the trend of allocating one mark to each content point has continued.

Listening note-taking sheet

Candidates listen to a meeting between Ms Mira Ray, the Chair of the Inter-School Visual Media Society, and Mr Ringo Chow, the teacher who liaises with Nico Lin (their role). As is the case of 2018, four headings are provided and there are even some sub-headings to help students organize their notes.

Part B1 Data File

Compared to the Part B2 Data File, the Part B1 Data File contains more items but is still much shorter and easier. Graphical sources include a poster for the competition (Page 5) and some survey results (Page 10). These should be easy to understand even for the less able candidates. The only sources that contain longer paragraphs are the instructional email (Page 4) and the minutes of a meeting (Page 6); information in the other sources, e.g. a web page, a list of rules and a fact file, is presented in point form.

Part B1 Task 5

This task requires candidates to fill out a checklist concerning the design of a poster for the video competition.

Items 3, 5, 7 and 9 are straightforward as candidates simply have to see whether or not the listed items appear in the poster on page 5.

Items 6 and 10 may pose a challenge to less able candidates as they have to compare the poster on page 5 to the tips on page 7 and provide the required information to be included in the poster based on the rules for the competition. The implication for teachers is that students must be taught to synthesize information by looking at multiple Data File items even when they are dealing with the easiest task in the easiest section of the whole paper.

Part B1 Task 6

Task 6 requires candidates to write an email to somebody who submitted a video that does not meet the requirements of the competition. To get the content points, candidates have to read both the online submission form and the rules of the competition carefully, and then identify problematic aspects of the submitted video.

Some candidates may overlook the fact that the new deadline (which is mentioned on the recording) has to be included at the end of the email as this requirement is not given in the instructional email (Page 4) nor in the WhatsApp exchange (Page 9). Mira does say that the entrant ‘might still have time before the new deadline’, but less able candidates may not be able to catch that passing remark. Students should be reminded that the instructions in the Question-Answer Book—‘using information from the B1 Data File *and your own notes*’—may be significant. In this task, for example, it turns out that the new deadline is the only content point from the recording.

Candidates who express their dissatisfaction bluntly will lose marks in appropriacy. The instructional email has already specified that the tone should be encouraging and positive. Students should be taught to use palatable language when criticizing others. Appropriacy marks will also be deducted if an appropriate opening and closing (e.g. ‘Dear Akira’, ‘Best wishes/Yours sincerely’) is absent.

Part B1 Task 7

In Task 7, candidates have to write a short announcement for the video competition’s prize-giving ceremony. Essential information includes who the host and the judge are and what activity has been planned for the ceremony. While none of these is directly given in the Data File, these content points are readily accessible to candidates as the figures on pages 9 and 10 make the answers very obvious. Candidates are advised to write about 100 words, making this the shortest extended writing task in Part B1 in the HKDSE so far.

In terms of appropriacy, candidates should not write in an overly formal tone as that may appear unwelcoming. Teachers might want to emphasize how an awareness of the audience may be displayed. Students should also make an effort to avoid irrelevant ideas, e.g. the fact that the host ‘hates spiders’ and ‘refuses to fly on planes’.

Part B2 Data File

The Part B2 Data File is considerably more complex than its Part B1 counterpart. There is a mix of formal items (minutes and governmental regulations) and informal ones (a forum, notes, an interview transcript and a WhatsApp exchange). The informal material often has to be rewritten in formal language to suit the requirements of the tasks, especially when it comes to the report (Task 8) and the speech (Task 10).

Part B2 Task 8

Task 8 requires candidates to write a report detailing the unsuitability of the Brighthouse Cinema as the venue for a film screening. It is mentioned in the conversation between Ms Mira Ray and Mr Ringo Chow that there are three requirements that the venue has to meet. That provides a clear starting point and structure for the candidates as they would expect to find information about the venue to prove that those requirements are not met. Nonetheless, they may feel that they have included all content points and overlook one last problem—that is, the cinema failed the government’s inspection in 2016 (mentioned in the notes on page 7). Some details in the notes, e.g. that the cinema is cleaned every two days, may not seem to be problems unless read together with the governmental regulations produced on page 9. Candidates should remain vigilant at all times when working on Part B2, for seemingly irrelevant information can turn out to be relevant as one reads on.

Reports, whether or not they are explicitly named as such, have appeared in Part B2 of every HKDSE Paper 3 since 2016 and students must be acquainted with the writing conventions, e.g. a title, an introduction, headings and a conclusion (sometimes optional, e.g. Task 8 in 2018), so that their work is reader-friendly and coherent. Unfamiliarity with the text type will result in a loss of marks in the coherence and organization as well as the appropriacy domains.

Part B2 Task 9

Task 9 is possibly the most challenging task in Part B for the following reasons.

- Candidates have to write a synopsis of the film 'The Electronic Durian' and this is a text type that had never appeared in the HKDSE prior to 2019. They may not be accustomed to reading, let alone writing, synopses in English. They may not be familiar with certain writing conventions, e.g. the use of the present tense in describing plot-lines, and lose language and appropriacy marks as a result.
- While most of the plot details are given in one single source (the interview transcript on pages 8 and 9), the interviewee does not give the points in chronological order. In other words, candidates have to reorder the events so that they will make sense to the reader. A similar task is Task 9 in 2016, in which scattered bits of the story about two girls surviving Typhoon Ellen have to be painstakingly put together.
- One of the content points—that the film is set in 2030—is found in the WhatsApp exchange on page 10 but not in the interview transcript on pages 8 and 9 where the plot line is given. Candidates might feel that they have successfully gathered all the content points and neglect that lone piece of information in another source.

High achievers may benefit from short exercises requiring them to 'reassemble' fragments of information and present them as a coherent whole as they can prepare for the demands of such tasks.

Part B2 Task 10

Candidates have to write a speech on the 'current state of cinema' in Task 10. The two issues to be covered in the speech are given as subheadings on the note-taking sheet.

A relatively challenging aspect of this task is that candidates have to change informal Internet language into more formal language to ensure appropriacy. A candidate who reproduces this forum posting—'That's why people even idiots like you, will always need to go to the cinema. To share the experience.'—will certainly have marks taken off for inappropriate language. In order to score high marks in the domains of language and appropriacy, students must acquire the skill of rewriting sentences or paragraphs in more formal language.

HKDSE Paper 3 Statistics (2012–2019)

Mark Distribution

Year	Part A					Part B1				Part B2			
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Total	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Total	Task 8	Task 9	Task 10	Total
2012	13	13	14	13	53	12	18	18	48	18	18	18	54
2013	14	13	15	16	58	18	18	18	54	18	18	18	54
2014	12	15	15	18	60	18	18	18	54	18	18	18	54
2015	17	14	16	11	58	18	18	18	54	18	18	18	54
2016	15	16	16	11	58	18	18	18	54	18	18	18	54
2017	13	13	15	13	54	17	19	17	53	22	18	13	53
2018	13	13	13	12	51	14	18	20	52	22	13	17	52
2019	14	13	13	13	53	16	19	18	53	18	17	18	53
Average	13.9	13.8	14.6	13.4	55.6	16.4	18.3	18.1	52.8	19.0	17.3	17.3	53.5

Task Completion Marks and Content Points (Part B)

Year	Part B1					Part B2					
	Task 5	Task 6		Task 7		Task 8		Task 9		Task 10	
	TC/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
2017	13	10	10	8	8	13	13	9	9	7	7
2018	12	9	9	11	11	13	13	7	7	8	8
2019	14	10	10	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9
Average	14.4	9.3	9.8	9.1	11.6	10	12.4	8.6	9.9	8.6	10.8

Data File Items/Word Count (Part B)

Year	Part B1		Part B2	
	Data File Items	Word Count	Data File Items	Word Count
2012	7	1,070	8	1,768
2013	9	1,254	10	1,866
2014	9	1,517	13	1,902
2015	11	1,440	10	2,087
2016	9	1,256	10	2,009
2017	9	1,396	11	2,310
2018	7	1,224	8	1,787
2019	10	1,139	8	1,941
Average	8.9	1,287	9	1,958.8

Word Limit (Part B Tasks 6–10)

Year	Part B1			Part B2			
	Task 6	Task 7	Total	Task 8	Task 9	Task 10	Total
2012	120	150	270	150	200	200	550
2013	120	150	270	150	120	200	470
2014	120	150	270	150	150	200	500
2015	120	150	270	120	180	200	500
2016	120	150	270	120	150	200	470
2017	120	120	240	220	150	100	470
2018	120	150	270	220	120	150	490
2019	150	100	250	180	120	200	500
Average	123.8	140	263.8	163.8	148.8	181.3	493.8