

ATTENTION

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HKDSE English Language Exam Analysis Report 2020 (Papers 1–3)

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2020 HKDSE · Paper 1 (Reading)

Overview

	Part A	Part B1		Part B2
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4
Text Type	Feature article	Web page	Feature article	Column
Topic	Tai Kwun	Kite flying		Graham Norton (comedian) on writing advice column
Title	<i>Tai Kwun: The Big House is Finally Open</i>	<i>How to fly a kite</i>	<i>The Grounding of Hong Kong's Kites</i>	<i>Graham Norton: "The letters I can never forget"</i>
Source	<i>Zolima CityMag</i>	American Kitefliers Association	<i>Varsity</i>	<i>The Telegraph</i>
Word Count	1,033	362	690	1,217
Questions	19	13	9	21
Marks	42	23	19	42

Reading Passages

Part A

Part A comprises one feature article (Text 1) about Tai Kwun, a cultural compound in Central that was previously Victoria Prison and Central Police Station. In the article, the architects explain their design and a few individuals, including the Head of Heritage at Tai Kwun, an activist, an architectural conservationist and an art critic, give their comments.

Number of passages: The 2020 paper has one Part A passage only. Prior to this year, there had been five papers with one Part A passage (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017 and 2019) and three papers with two (2015, 2016 and 2018).

Text type: The sole Part A passage this year is a feature article. Feature articles in which the author interviews a number of people and discusses a topic from multiple perspectives without giving his/her own take should be familiar to most candidates.

Topic: This year's passage is on heritage conservation. While it could appear to be a potentially challenging topic, the level of difficulty is lowered by the fact that the context is local and the heritage site involved—Tai Kwun—is well known. Candidates may have already paid a visit with their family and friends, or as part of a school trip. Compared to 2019, when candidates read about messiness and work efficiency, Part A in 2020 is probably slightly harder, but the topic should still be accessible to the average candidate.

Level of difficulty: For candidates of average ability and above, this passage should be a reasonably easy read because it is largely a chronological account that describes Tai Kwun's past, the ups and downs of the design and revitalization processes and the 'new life' of the compound, in this order. Quite a few of the paragraphs consist solely of a quote from an interviewee. Still, this passage is cognitively more demanding than what appeared in 2019. The interview article last year was in a question-and-answer format for readers to follow the flow of the ideas. This feature article, on the other hand, has no such 'cues' (e.g. subheadings). Moreover, there are a number of vocabulary items that are relatively advanced (e.g. 'aloof', 'arduous', 're-christened', 'spindly', 'venerable', 'missteps', 'scrawled' and 'inaugural') or topic-specific (e.g. 'compound', 'designation', 'pavilion', 'scaffolding', 'auditorium', 'aluminium-clad', 'patina' and 'revitalisation'). As far as the questions are concerned, not all of these words are significant, but less able candidates may have trouble comprehending the overall meaning of certain sentences or paragraphs.

Part B1

Part B1 comprises a web page (Text 2) on how to fly a kite and a feature article (Text 3) on the decrease in popularity of kite flying as a pastime in Hong Kong.

Number of passages: There are two passages in Part B1 this year, compared to three in 2019. 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. This is the second consecutive year that a web page has appeared in Part B1.

Topic: Both passages address the theme of kites. While some candidates may not have any kite-flying experience, most should know what a kite is. Text 2 is a general guide to the activity whereas Text 3 describes the 'dying' kite-flying culture in Hong Kong. These topics should be interesting and relevant.

Level of difficulty: 2020 HKDSE candidates who attempted Part B1 should have had no major trouble going through the passages. Text 2 comes with short subheadings, e.g. 'Wind', 'Flying space' and 'Beware', that guide candidates. While there are no subheadings in Text 3, it is easy to follow for it is largely a chronological account which begins with the 1950s and 1960s, when kite flying was extremely popular, and ends with an account of how the number of kite fliers is dwindling at present. Both texts are written in accessible language and there is hardly any advanced vocabulary.

Part B2

Part B2 comprises a column (Text 4). Graham Norton, a famous comedian who wrote an advice column in *The Telegraph* for more than a decade, explains how he offers advice as an 'agony uncle'. Norton's 'personal brand of tough love' is illustrated using two letters from readers—one 'serious' and the other 'silly'—attached to the text together with his responses. As in 2019, Parts B1 and B2 are not thematically linked, as opposed to 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Number of passages: Part B2 in 2020 is similar to that in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2019 in that there is only one passage.

Text type: The passage is a column. While columns had never come up in Part B2 before, the text is stylistically very similar to the excerpts from the autobiographies of Stephen Fry (2014 Text 4) and Clive James (2019 Text 5), with its dose of dry humour and (on occasion) sarcasm. Students should be encouraged to read authentic materials in English as widely as possible (i.e. not only feature and opinion articles) in order to be able to fully appreciate the nuances in the language.

Topic: In the column, Graham Norton speaks of many different kinds of people who have written to him for advice and how he responds. While people seldom write letters to 'agony uncles' and 'agony aunts' in Hong Kong nowadays, the topic should not be hard for candidates to understand given that they have been trained to write letters of advice and are likely to have been introduced to the concept of advice columns in newspapers. The relationship problems, dilemmas, etc. that Norton mentions are interesting and sometimes amusing.

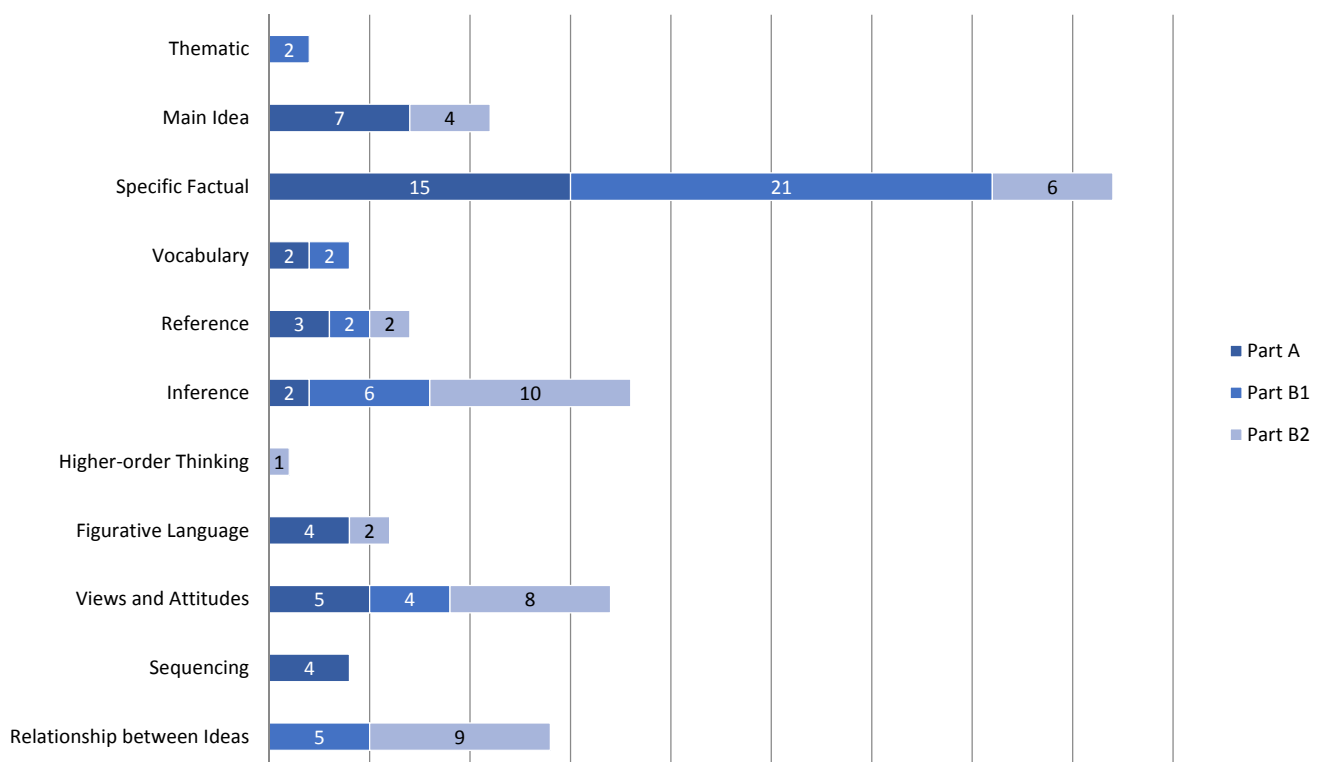
Level of difficulty: The Part B2 passage is rather challenging. Quite a lot of figurative language is used, such as 'my Pandora's postbag' (candidates are expected to know the expression 'Pandora's box'), '[having] my fingers on the throbbing pulse of the Telegraph readership and a soothing ice pack at its pounding temple' (comparing himself to a doctor), 'smelling salts in one hand, a sticking plaster for the soul in the other' (those who seek advice may get a tongue-lashing or a kind word in return, depending on whether their problems are 'silly' or 'serious'), etc. Advanced vocabulary items can be found throughout the text. To fully understand the passage, candidates have to be proficient users of English who are capable of appreciating British humour and distinguishing between serious and tongue-in-cheek remarks. Given that the metaphorical use of language was even more sophisticated in the 2019 passage, students who decide to attempt Part B2 must read widely and improve their comprehension of subtleties.

Questions

Question Types

Specific factual and inference questions remain the most common types of questions to appear in Paper 1, though many of the inference questions in Parts A and B1 are relatively straightforward. In fact, a candidate who attempted Parts A and B1 could get 36 marks just by getting all the specific factual questions right. Vocabulary and reference questions took up a lot of marks in the past but they seem to have decreased in importance. Teachers might also wish to note that there are a considerable number of ‘views and attitudes’ and ‘relationship between ideas’ questions this year.

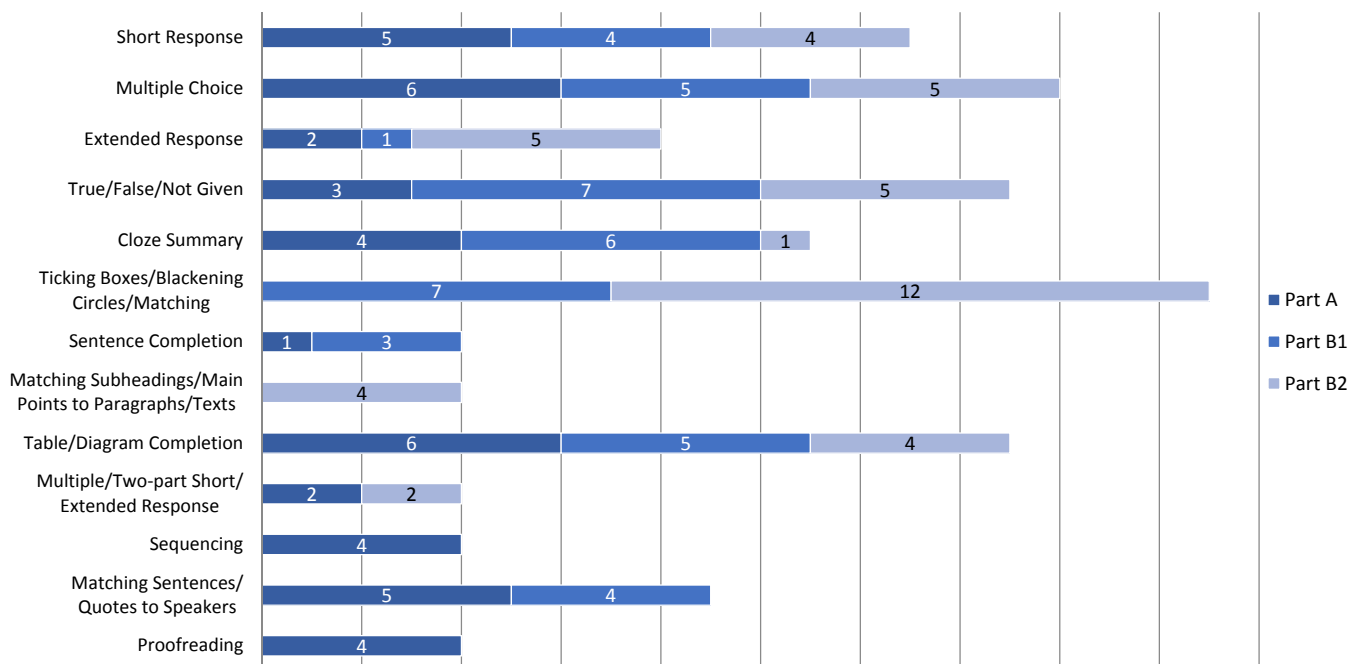
Question Type	Part A [42 marks]	Part B1 [42 marks]	Part B2 [42 marks]
Thematic	—	Q31, Q32	—
Main Idea	Q1 [3], Q12 [4]	—	Q51 [4]
Specific Factual	Q5, Q6 [3], Q11 [6], Q13, Q14 [4]	Q20, Q22, Q24 [2], Q25 [3], Q28 [2], Q29, Q30, Q33 [4], Q35 [2], Q36 [4]	Q45 [5], Q53
Vocabulary	Q2, Q9	Q38, Q40	—
Reference	Q8, Q16 [2]	Q23, Q39	Q47, Q55
Inference	Q7, Q15	Q21 [3], Q26, Q34, Q37	Q42, Q43, Q44, Q46, Q48, Q49, Q50, Q52, Q56, Q58
Higher-order Thinking	—	—	Q62
Figurative Language	Q3, Q4, Q10, Q17	—	Q54 [2]
Views and Attitudes	Q19 [5]	Q41 [4]	Q59, Q61 [7]
Sequencing	Q18 [4]	—	—
Language Usage	—	—	—
Relationship between Ideas	—	Q27 [5]	Q57 [4], Q60 [5]



Question Formats

As expected, 2020 Paper 1 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, of which there is only one in Part B1, the easiest section. To assist less able candidates in formulating their responses, some Part B1 questions are in the sentence completion format, i.e. the first few words of the answer are given. There are only a handful of cloze summary questions; instead, the table completion format appears to be ‘preferred’ when it comes to gap-filling. In Part A, there are a multiple-choice cloze question (which only appeared in 2016) and a proofreading question (which appeared in 2015 and 2019).

Question Format	Part A [42 marks]	Part B1 [42 marks]	Part B2 [42 marks]
Short Response	Q2, Q4, Q9, Q10, Q17	Q20, Q23, Q38, Q39	Q47, Q48, Q55, Q56
Multiple Choice	Q1 [3], Q3, Q5, Q8	Q26, Q29, Q31, Q32, Q40	Q42, Q43, Q52, Q53, Q59
Extended Response	Q7, Q15	Q30	Q44, Q49, Q50, Q58, Q62
True/False/Not Given	Q6 [3]	Q25 [3], Q33 [4]	Q45 [5]
Cloze Summary	Q12 [4]	Q24 [2], Q28 [2], Q35 [2]	Q46
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	—	Q21 [3], Q36 [4]	Q60 [5], Q61 [7]
Sentence Completion	Q13	Q22, Q34, Q37	—
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	—	—	Q51 [4]
Labelling Pictures	—	—	—
Table/Diagram Completion	Q11 [6]	Q27 [5]	Q57 [4]
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	Q16 [2]	—	Q54 [2]
Sequencing	Q18 [4]	—	—
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	Q19 [5]	Q41 [4]	—
Proofreading	Q14 [4]	—	—
Timeline Completion	—	—	—



Noteworthy Questions and Recommendations

Part A

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
4, 9, 10	Q4 and Q10 are figurative language questions whereas Q9 is a vocabulary question. Instead of asking candidates to find a word or phrase in a particular paragraph that matches the given meaning, these questions test whether they understand the purpose a word or phrase serves. To answer Q4 correctly, for example, candidates have to know the word ‘inaccessible’ and understand that it is used to describe how the compound used to be ‘disconnected from the daily lives of Hong Kong citizens’.	Students should be trained not only to find synonyms (which is relatively easy as they can refer to the part of speech and the grammatical properties of the given expression), but also to explain why the author uses a particular word or phrase. They should be exposed to questions of this sort: ‘Find a word which suggests that ...’, ‘Find a word which describes ...’, etc.
11, 12	Q11 is a specific factual question set in the table completion format whereas Q12 is a main idea question set in the cloze summary format. What they have in common is that candidates are asked to only use words or phrases that can be found in the text. There is also some novelty to Q11. While candidates have been allowed, on occasion, to use more than one word to fill in each blank, this is the first time in Paper 1 that the maximum number of words is specified (in this case, no more than three words per gap).	To avoid losing marks, students should always read the instructions carefully and ascertain whether the answers must come from the text and how many words are allowed in each blank.
13	This is a specific factual question set in the sentence completion format. The first three words of the answer are given. The word ‘lacks’ points candidates to the fact that ‘Central doesn’t have many open spaces’ and therefore ‘neighbours will just drop by [Tai Kwun] in the evening to meet up with their friends’. However, this may not be an adequate answer as the question requires candidates to explain how John Batten’s prediction has come true. Candidates should state what the prediction is (i.e. the buildings will evolve into a new appearance and function) so as to produce a coherent answer.	Students should ‘play safe’ and supply fuller, longer answers when in doubt (of course without contradicting themselves).
14	This is a specific factual question set in the proofreading format. This question format also appeared in 2019 so it should not be unfamiliar to candidates. Most of the time, once candidates manage to identify the problematic word, they only have to replace it with its antonym. However, Q14(iv) is an exception and therefore quite challenging. Candidates have to understand that the exhibition tells the stories of people whose lives are <i>affected</i> , not <i>disturbed</i> , by the prison and police station. While Ho Chi Minh was imprisoned and one might say that his life was ‘disturbed’, the owner of a Sheung Wan printing press certainly had fond memories. A word with a neutral connotation is required.	Despite the fact that proofreading questions in the HKDSE involve content errors only, assigning past HKALE and/or HKCEE papers to familiarize students with the format certainly does no harm. Considering the level of difficulty of Q14(iv), teachers might want to introduce to more able classes words that have similar meanings but dissimilar connotations, e.g. ‘disturbed’, ‘affected’, ‘changed’.
15	This is an inference question. Candidates have to explain why the mother spent the night at Chancery Lane next to the prison. Simply lifting a sentence from the text—‘Victoria Prison after lights off was the quietest place in Central’—is unlikely to suffice as candidates also need to mention that the mother wanted both the father and the son to sleep tight.	See Question 13. Students ought to use their common sense in answering such questions.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
18	This is a sequencing question that should pose no trouble to the average candidate. It is noteworthy because of the sheer number of marks allocated to it. Candidates have to order four events and each correct 'number' is worth 1 mark (i.e. 4 marks in total). In the past, such questions have only been worth 1 mark.	—

Part B1

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
21	This is an inference question that requires candidates to match the options on the website navigation menu to the given content. For example, candidates have to match 'buy a kite' to the menu option 'Find a Store'.	The web page as a text type has been making frequent appearances in DSE Paper 1 as well as the Data File in Paper 3. Students should be encouraged to surf English websites and familiarize themselves with the structure of a website. For instance, they would benefit from knowing that a retailer's website may consist of such sections as 'Home', 'About us', 'Products', 'Promotions' and 'Contact us'.
22, 24, 27, 28, 35	Q22, Q24, Q28 and Q35 are specific factual questions that are set in the cloze summary format, whereas Q27 is a relationship between ideas question set in the table completion format. Candidates are explicitly told to fill in each blank with one word from the text. Q27 may be slightly harder as the answers do not appear in order in the text. For instance, the answers to Q27(i), (ii) and (iii) are in paragraphs 6, 3 and 2 respectively.	See Part A Questions 11 and 12. Students should be more 'flexible' in handling cloze summary or table/diagram completion questions and be aware that the answers may not come in the expected order.

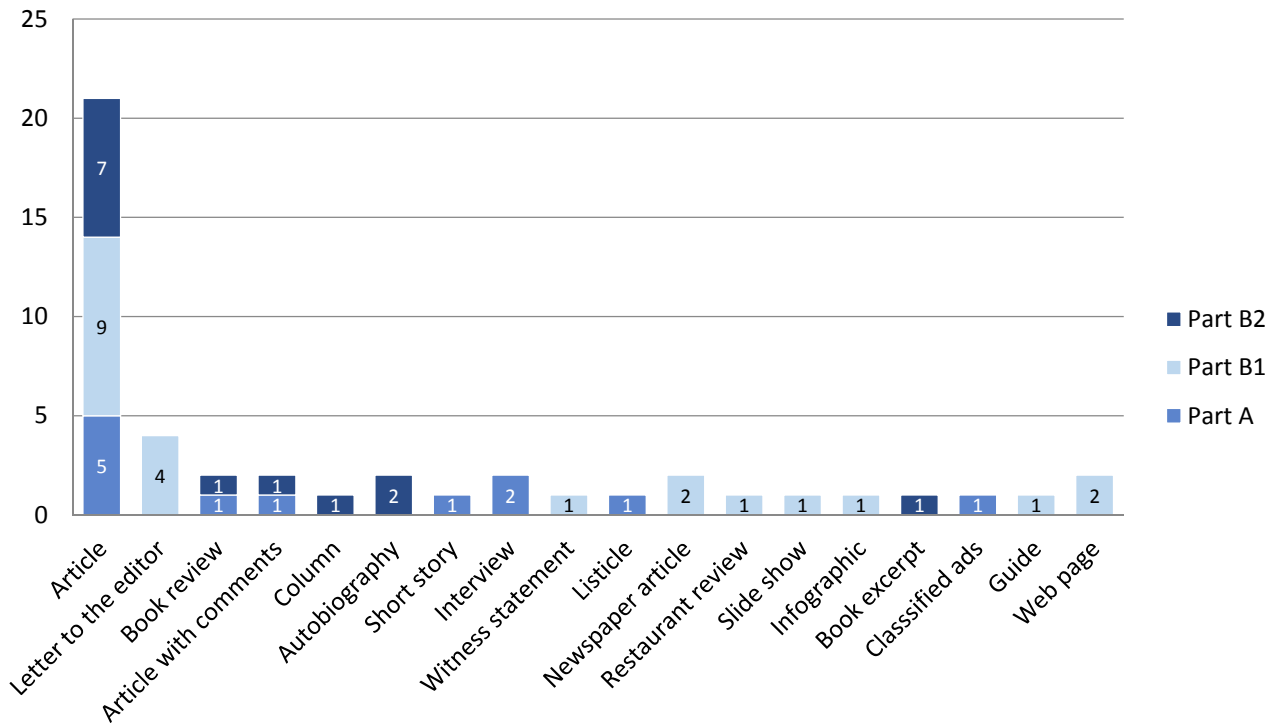
Part B2

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
43	This is an inference question. To infer that Norton disagrees with the statement, candidates have to understand the connotation of the verb 'claimed' and the expression 'Pandora's postbag of woes'. The latter is very good English but may be beyond those who know the meaning of neither 'Pandora's box' nor 'woes'.	—
44	This is an inference question. Less able candidates may be tempted to copy along the lines of 'my tough love diagnosis isn't for everyone', which does not address the question. In fact, the answer can only be found in the subsequent paragraphs that contrast 'problems' or self-obsessed whingeing to problems or genuine, urgent cries for help. Candidates then have to infer that it is the former (whingeing) that gets a tongue-lashing instead of a kind word.	Students should be aware that they may have to go beyond the paragraph level when making inferences.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
45	This is a specific factual question set in the True/False/Not Given format. Q45(iv) ('Norton often gives medical advice') is relatively challenging. While such words as 'plaster' and 'aspirin' can be found in the paragraphs, it is common sense that Norton as an 'agony uncle' does not administer or advise treatment. The words are used metaphorically, and therefore the statement is false.	Students should not read only for the literal meaning when dealing with True/False/Not Given questions.
46	This is an inference question set in the cloze summary format. Candidates have to pay attention to the words that surround the blank, e.g. the preposition 'between', as well as understand the meaning of 'stand out' in the text, to get the answer ('difference') right.	Teachers might want to assign rewriting exercises (e.g. cloze summary sections in past HKALE papers) which require students to replace a given word with another one that fulfils certain syntactic requirements, e.g. changing 'attract' to 'appeal to'.
48	This is an inference question. To suggest one factor that may lead to the 'potential pitfalls', candidates have to study the given case—a librarian from Manchester wanting to marry an Italian farmer half her age—and identify the age difference, language barriers, different occupations, etc. as a reason why the marriage is unlikely to work. Some use of common sense is necessary here.	To ensure that students will not lose marks because of an inability to understand the question, they should be acquainted with such vocabulary items as 'drawback', 'pitfall' and 'shortcoming'.
54	This is a figurative language question which requires candidates to identify metaphors with specific meanings, such as 'plain sailing' as a metaphor for a very easy task.	While this type of question is usually manageable, students with a weaker language foundation are advised to check their answers by 'mentally substituting' them with the given meaning in the text and see if the sentence makes sense. For instance, 'I'm not saying it will be all <u>plain sailing</u> (a very easy task)' is comprehensible and therefore the answer is likely to be correct.
57	This is a relationship between ideas question set in the diagram completion format. Candidates have to fill in each blank using a maximum of four words per blank, and the answers may or may not appear in the text.	See Part A Questions 11 and 12.
58	This is an inference question. Before anything, candidates have to understand the sarcasm throughout Norton's response to P Smith. If they take his remarks seriously, they will almost certainly produce such literal, erroneous answers as 'a fringe will cover his eyes'. From the first sentence in his response—'What comes out of the top of your head? Steel wool?'—one should already know that Norton is trying to mock P Smith. The 'suggestion' of sporting a longer fringe is simply an attempt to highlight how silly P Smith's 'problem' is.	—
62	This is a higher-order thinking question. Candidates are asked to explain why the 'medical' metaphor is appropriate in the 'agony uncle' context. To get a mark, they must clearly compare the responsibility of an agony uncle to that of a doctor and identify the similarities.	Students should be reminded to consider the key characteristics of the metaphor (a doctor heals, gives advice, etc.) and explain the usage with reference to a relevant characteristic.

HKDSE Paper 1 Statistics (2012–2020)

Text Types



Number of Texts

Year	Part A	Part B1	Part B2
2012	1	1	2
2013	1	2	1
2014	1	2	1
2015	2	2	2
2016	2	5	3
2017	1	3	1
2018	2	2	2
2019	1	3	1
2020	1	2	1
Average	1.3	2.4	1.6

Reading Passages Word Count

Year	Part A	Part B1	Part B2
2012	994	888	1,103 (194+909)
2013	1,088	818 (412+406)	1,090
2014	956	894 (378+516)	1,105
2015	1,022 (729+293)	914 (225+689)	1,114 (997+117)
2016	988 (237+751)	881 (65+90+299+117+310)	1,116 (380+444+292)
2017	1,057	768 (354+25+389)	1,190
2018	1,090 (160+930)	1,066 (581+485)	1,213 (447+766)
2019	1,088	971 (170+421+380)	1,163
2020	1,033	1,052 (362+690)	1,217
Average	1,035	917	1,146

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
2020	19	42	22	42	21	42
Average	23	43	24	42	24	42

Question Types

Parts A+B1

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Thematic	2	1	1	2	0	0	3	2	2
Main Idea	6	3	1	12	7	2	4	6	7
Specific Factual	13	21	28	10	17	25	15	11	36
Vocabulary	4	2	4	4	3	8	6	4	4
Reference	3	3	6	5	4	2	6	6	5
Inference	10	12	16	12	7	2	8	6	8
Higher-order Thinking	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0
Figurative Language	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	4	4
Views and Attitudes	1	0	0	4	5	1	0	1	9
Sequencing	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	4
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	5

Parts A+B2

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Thematic	1	1	0	3	0	1	2	1	0
Main Idea	9	6	3	13	8	2	4	4	11
Specific Factual	10	14	20	3	13	21	8	9	21
Vocabulary	8	2	1	5	5	2	8	6	2
Reference	4	3	9	5	2	1	4	7	5
Inference	14	12	18	13	12	9	14	10	12
Higher-order Thinking	3	2	1	2	0	3	0	0	1
Figurative Language	1	2	3	3	3	2	7	3	6
Views and Attitudes	2	0	0	5	3	1	0	2	13
Sequencing	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	4
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9

 **Question Formats**

Parts A+B1

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Short Response	10	13	26	30	13	12	14	11	9
Multiple Choice	11	9	11	7	13	13	11	10	11
Extended Response	1	4	5	2	6	7	7	1	3
True/False/Not Given	2	4	4	2	2	2	2	3	10
Cloze Summary	2	3	0	1	4	3	4	3	10
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	1	3	1	0	1	2	3	3	7
Sentence Completion	3	1	2	0	0	0	2	4	4
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0
Labelling Pictures	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	11
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	1	2
Sequencing	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	9
Proofreading	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4
Timeline Completion	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0

Parts A+B2

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Short Response	17	11	26	24	17	6	17	13	9
Multiple Choice	15	11	11	6	13	9	11	9	11
Extended Response	9	7	4	5	7	7	9	6	7
True/False/Not Given	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	8
Cloze Summary	2	4	1	2	1	1	5	2	5
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	12
Sentence Completion	1	0	2	0	2	2	1	2	1
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	4
Labelling Pictures	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	10
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	3	4
Sequencing	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	5
Proofreading	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	4
Timeline Completion	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0

2020 HKDSE · Paper 2 (Writing)

Part A

Question 1

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
1	Restaurant review	User of <i>Eat & Drink</i>	Readers of <i>Eat & Drink</i>	Informal

This is the first time that candidates have been asked to write a restaurant review in Paper 2. As expected in Part A—a short, guided writing task—quite a lot of prompts are given. Not only are candidates advised to write about the positives and negatives of the dining experience and whether they would recommend the restaurant, the type of cuisine (Chinese dim sum) and the aspects that they are expected to write about (food, service, dining environment and/or price) are also specified. There are even a few boxes for candidates to tick and indicate whether the restaurant would be suitable for children/family, romantic date, business or special occasions. With the extensive prompts, it is very unlikely that any candidate would go off topic. The fact that the review must be on a dim sum restaurant also lowers the level of difficulty as dim sum is a local favourite.

Nonetheless, the question may still pose some difficulties to candidates who are unfamiliar with the restaurant review as a text type. While OpenRice is a very popular online food guide, the content is mostly in Chinese. The average candidate may not have read any restaurant reviews written in English. As they write, they may find that they are lost for words such as adjectives to describe the food. They may also be ignorant of how a restaurant review ought to be structured. A review is different from a diary or blog entry in that a chronological account is seldom preferable. Instead of describing the entire dining experience from start to finish, candidates should address different aspects in distinct paragraphs and include a brief introduction and conclusion.

Part A General Recommendations

Part A questions tend to require candidates to exercise their creativity and/or 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: Candidates write a yearbook entry upon graduation describing their 'academic life' and 'student life' in secondary school

2020: 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 daily life, family, school activities, etc. and encourage them to include personal experiences even when writing longer argumentative essays, debate speeches, letters to the editor and the like. Given the challenges that this year's question may pose to candidates who lack exposure to restaurant reviews in English, teachers should make use of more authentic written materials of different types in class and draw students' attention to the relevant genre conventions.

Part B

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
2	Essay	A student	The English teacher	Formal
3	News report	A reporter	Readers of the <i>Hong Kong Post</i>	Semi-formal
4	Letter	A staff member of a hotel	The manager	Formal
5	Letter	Not specified	The President of the IOC	Formal
6	Essay	Not specified	Not specified	Formal

7	Article	A reporter	Readers of <i>Do-Re-Mi</i>	Semi-formal
8	Short story	Not specified	Judges of the competition	Not applicable
9	Blog entry	A foreign blogger	Readers of <i>World Passport</i>	Informal

In terms of both form and substance, this year's paper is quite similar to last year's:

- **Bullet points:** The instructions to each question are given in two bullet points, compared to three to four last year. Instructions in paragraph form were the norm prior to 2019.
- **Pictorial prompts:** The prompt of each question contains at least one picture. Last year, pictures could be found in 3 out of 8 questions. Some of the images do assist candidates in understanding the context (Q2, Q3, Q9), but others apparently only serve a cosmetic purpose (Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8).
- **Diversified text types:** In recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of 'traditional' exam text types, such as one-sided argumentative essays and letters to the editor. Many recent questions demand analytical, descriptive writing. An essay may require candidates to describe and explain a phenomenon (Q2) instead of arguing for or against a proposition. Candidates' ability to analyse an issue and come up with convincing details is tested via news reports (Q3) and feature articles (Q7).

Question 2: Popular Culture

This question requires candidates to write an essay giving reasons why some Hong Kong housing estates appeal to Instagrammers and how residents feel about that. Pictures of two 'popular' photo-taking venues in Wong Tai Sin and Quarry Bay are given. Since the locations are reasonably famous and recognizable, candidates should have no trouble understanding the question.

Candidates have to strike a good balance between analysing why people enjoy taking pictures at those housing estates and reporting on residents' feelings. They may be tempted to complete this task as if it were a news article, especially when it comes to the second part. However, as this is an essay, they are expected to employ a formal register and avoid excessively long direct quotes. They should also make sure that different voices are represented objectively, just like in a report, even though it would be fine to indicate their personal opinion at the very end. Generally speaking, candidates ought to be comfortable with and skilful at writing in an impersonal style.

Question 3: Social Issues

This question requires candidates to explain, in a news report for the *Hong Kong Post*, why the number of small independent stationery shops in Hong Kong has decreased and discuss whether they will be able to survive. Despite the 'news report' label, the focus of this writing task is not on reporting a recent event (e.g. a stationery shop closing down) but analysing a broader issue. In other words, what candidates end up writing is more likely to resemble a feature article than a news report.

As is the case with any expository task, candidates need to express a clear opinion and provide points in support of that. However, to answer this question well, a certain degree of creativity is also necessary. Since this is a news report, candidates would be well advised to make up details of interviews conducted with owners of stationery shops, customers, District Councillors, etc., in order to illustrate the situation from multiple perspectives.

Question 4: Workplace Communication

This question requires candidates to assume the role of a staff member at the Park Hotel and write a letter to the manager applying for a work transfer to the Shanghai branch. The task is challenging as the context is rather foreign to secondary school candidates. Those who are unable to name the departments of a hotel, such as the reception, the concierge, housekeeping and F&B (food and beverage) will have problems 'highlighting their work experience'. An understanding of cover letters and the related vocabulary, e.g. 'a team player', 'able to work under pressure' and 'strong communication skills', would definitely help.

Question 5: Sports Communication

This is a relatively 'traditional' question requiring candidates to write a letter to the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) proposing that Dragon Boat Racing be made an Olympic event and giving reasons for that. The prompts are in fact rather constraining since the three criteria for a new Olympic event are provided and candidates are expected to make out a case for Dragon Boat Racing by showing that it meets all requirements. The arguments are essentially 'given' and candidates merely have to elaborate on them, rendering the task very manageable, if not a bit dull. Strong candidates who wish to stand out from the crowd must be precise and specific in explaining their ideas. For instance, instead of simply saying that Dragon Boat Racing is exciting and would 'definitely' appeal to young people, they have to outline the qualities of the sport that draw Hong Kong young people to it, mention how popular it is among university students, etc.

Question 6: Debating

This is another ‘traditional’ question requiring candidates to write an argumentative essay either for or against the effectiveness of food warning labels in changing people’s eating habits. As always, candidates should express their opinion unequivocally at the beginning and put forward strong arguments. A counterargument is optional but those who wish to include one should avoid repeating points that they have already raised. Also worth noting is that candidates are not given any specific role in writing this essay, nor are they asked to write for a specific audience (their teacher, readers of a publication, etc.). This is reminiscent of older past paper questions where only a statement which candidates had to argue for or against was provided.

Question 7: Poems and Songs

This question requires candidates to write a feature article about Zoe Kwan, the ‘Best New Artist’ at the HKTV Music Awards, detailing her rise to fame and how she is inspired to write her songs. The situation is quite specific: very likely she is young (as she is the ‘Best *New* Artist’); she rose to fame *suddenly*; and she probably is a singer-songwriter (as she talks about ‘the ideas behind her songs’ in the interview). Still, there is plenty of room for candidates to flex their creative muscles. In a nutshell, they have to make up Zoe’s life experiences, the names of her hit songs and so on. As this is a feature article, a hook at the beginning and an appropriate number of direct quotes are also appropriate.

Another element of this question that may be significant is that candidates are given the role of a reporter of a music magazine. Those who would subscribe to such a magazine should be quite well versed in music and the entertainment industry in general. Candidates who attempt this question have to bear their role and target audience in mind and incorporate specific vocabulary items, e.g. ‘singer-songwriter’ and ‘platinum record’, into their article.

Question 8: Short Stories

As expected, candidates are required to write an imaginative composition. The major difference between this question and those that appeared in past DSE papers is that candidates need to write the first chapter of a longer story instead of the entire story. This actually makes it easier for candidates to build suspense, develop their characters, refine the plot and so on. The given scenario—a mysterious one in which research staff in an Arctic station disappears one by one—easily lends itself to a sci-fi or horror story. While the question does not specify the length of the entire story, it would be wise for candidates to attempt to drive the plot forward and include a cliffhanger or two so as to address the given prompt and create a ‘wow’ factor. An exposition which merely describes the main character or sets the scene may not provide enough material for the marker to assess. Students who wish to attempt the Short Stories question should read a wide range of literary works and write in their leisure time so as to strengthen their ability to construct believable, alluring plot lines and relatable characters.

Question 9: Drama

This question requires candidates to write a blog post for a travel blog with a cultural orientation about a Chinese Opera performance in the Xiqu Centre. Pictures of the venue and a Chinese Opera performance are given. The focus of the blog entry is on how watching the performance at that venue made the writer realize that Chinese Opera could be enjoyable. This question is rather difficult for three reasons: first, candidates have to write from the point of view of a visitor to Hong Kong; second, very few candidates are familiar with Chinese Opera; finally, even those who are interested will have a hard time describing the costumes, make-up, plot, dialogue, etc. in English, without inundating the blog entry with transliterations.

Part B General Recommendations

Part B in 2020 confirms some of the observations made last year. To ensure that students are well prepared for the upcoming examinations, teachers might want to note the following:

- Although there are still ‘traditional’ one-sided argumentative writing questions, there is a growing number of questions that do not fit that bill. Students should be trained to write analytically and descriptively and be exposed to more authentic text types as well.
- Direct teaching of elective modules may be necessary. Students will likely need a lot of thematic vocabulary items to do well on this year’s Workplace Communication, Poems and Songs and Drama, for example.
- The conspicuous absence of letters to the editor (since 2018) and letters to the principal (since 2016) from Part B is notable.

2020 HKDSE · Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills)

Part A

Part A of Paper 3 in 2020 consists of four short listening tasks on the theme of exploration. For the first time, candidates are not given a situation and an overall context in which they listen to the recordings. Instead, the context in each task is different. The speed of the recording and the frequency of repetition are comparable to previous papers. This year's Task 4, most of which involves excerpts from an audiobook, appears to be slightly slower than usual.

Task	Context	Question Formats	Task Type	Marks
1	Two students looking at a web page about an expedition to Brazil offered by World Watch Travel	Gap-filling, ticking boxes, matching on a map	Web page	16
2	A documentary maker interviewing an expert who has found new species of sea animals	Gap-filling, MCQ, ordering pictures, table, ticking boxes	Note sheet	13
3	A history museum tour guide talking to two visitors about an expedition to North-East Siberia	Gap-filling, MCQ, table, Q&A	Note sheet	13
4	A historian commenting on excerpts from an audiobook	Q&A	Note sheet	10

Task 1

Task 1 is the easiest task in Part A. Candidates listen to a conversation between two students who are looking at a web page about an expedition to Brazil offered by World Watch Travel. Question formats include gap-filling, ticking boxes and matching places to locations on a map.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
1	The answer, 'Brazil', is first given by Julia (the girl), who says, 'you go on an eco-friendly adventure to a protected part of the <i>Brazilian</i> rainforest', then repeated by Mark (the boy), who gives the name of the country by saying, 'Oh, it's in Brazil.' Despite the repetition, some weaker candidates may have trouble getting the spelling right.	Teachers of weaker classes might want to familiarize their students with place names, country names, demonyms (e.g. German, French). Last year, in Task 2, candidates were required to change 'Italian' to 'Italy'.
11, 12, 13, 14	Candidates are given a map where several locations are labelled with letters and illustrations. While the questions are quite straightforward, candidates have to listen for directions (e.g. 'south-east'), keywords that describe what one can do at a particular location and the names of the animals that populate an area in order to find out where the campsites are.	—

Task 2

Task 2 is slightly more challenging than Task 1 but remains manageable. Candidates listen to a documentary maker interview an expert who is conducting research on the Alonso Trench and has found new species of snailfish. Question formats include gap-filling, multiple choice, table completion and ticking boxes.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
18	Candidates have to choose the option that explains why Dr Carter's team decided to explore the Alonso Trench. To get this question right, candidates must pay	Students should always be advised to listen not just for keywords but also for overall understanding.

	attention to the use of connectives and avoid distractors. Dr Carter says, ‘It’s simply <i>because</i> we don’t know much about it yet, <i>even though</i> it’s actually quite near the coast.’ The answer is therefore B (It is a relatively unknown area), not A (It is near the coast).	
18, 19, 29	These are multiple-choice questions, a rarity in Paper 3 Part A. This is, however, more a change in form than a change in substance as these questions could easily have been presented in the familiar ‘ticking boxes’ format.	—
20, 21, 22	These questions are relatively hard. Candidates have to match Dr Carter’s descriptions of three animals to the images. They also have to indicate the order in which she mentions them by writing 1, 2 and 3 (instead of just ticking boxes).	Students would benefit from short in-class exercises testing their ability to match descriptions on tape to a series of given images.

Task 3

This year’s Task 3 appears to be easier than last year’s as the amount of note-taking has been reduced. In the recording, a history museum tour guide talks to two visitors about an ill-fated expedition to North-East Siberia. Question formats include gap-filling, multiple choice, table completion and question-and-answer.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
35, 36	These are multiple-choice questions. The answer to Q36 (what the <i>main</i> problem with the cans of food was) is option C (low-quality ingredients) but option A (dangerous metals in the cans) was mentioned as a theory that has been proved wrong. Candidates have to listen for understanding and avoid distractors.	See Task 2 Question 18.
40	As the tour guide explains what is strange about where <i>The Shadow</i> was found, she says, ‘The name of the area was almost the same as that of the ship. It was found in an area called Shadow Bay.’ Candidates who only manage to jot down the second sentence may not be able to get the mark as it does not directly address the question (why it is surprising). A relatively long answer is needed here.	Students should understand that a single answer can be given over two or three sentences and take notes in the margins if they are unable to note down the full answer immediately.

Task 4

Task 4 is the most difficult task in Part A. Even more able candidates may struggle if they do not take notes before completing or tidying up their answers. Candidates listen to parts of an audiobook followed by a historian’s commentary. Both the audiobook and the commentary are monologues so weaker candidates may have trouble following the flow of ideas. 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 easy since all questions involve note-taking and require relatively long answers. Nonetheless, compared to 2019, this year’s Task 4 seems more manageable as the amount of note-taking is reduced, many of the answers can be readily identified if candidates bear the ‘cue words’ given by the question in mind and the speed at which the audiobook is read is slightly slower than a natural conversation. As always, there is very little repetition in Task 4.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
45	The question asks why <i>Peter thought</i> the guides did not want to continue. However, before he gives his take, he mentions the tour guides’ claim that the area was unsafe because of a recent earthquake. Some	Students should read each question carefully and supply relevant answers.

candidates may be confused by this distractor and fail to provide the correct answer, said later—that (Peter thought that) they were afraid of making the Leopard God angry.
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Part B

Part B of Paper 3 in 2020 presents candidates with a workplace situation. Candidates assume the role of Nico Lin, an assistant to the director of Star Pod, an organization that runs space-themed adventure camps for children. This context is similar to that in many past papers but different from last year’s, which is school-life-related. Parts B1 and B2 consist of three tasks each and it appears that the practice of allocating one ‘Task Completion’ mark to each content point has been maintained.

Task	Context	Text Type	Word Limit	Marks
5	Writing a script for a video that will be played before campers enter the Mars Experience Room	Instruction video script	100	18
6	Responding to a letter of complaint by a parent whose daughter joined a camp but was dissatisfied	Formal email of reply	150	18
7	Completing a Frequently Asked Questions page for the company website	FAQ for parents	—	17
8	Write a script for a video introducing a camp activity to campers	Introductory video script	150	18
9	Reporting an accident that occurred to a participant at the campsite	Incident report	150	18
10	Declining a charity’s request to borrow a replica space capsule	Formal email of reply	200	17

Listening Note-taking Sheet

Candidates listen to a podcast where Ellen Ochoa (‘their’ boss) speaks to an astronaut and a professor. As usual, four headings are provided and there are even some bullet points under the first heading to help candidates organize their notes. A noticeable difference from last year’s note-taking sheet, however, is that there is one ‘section’ in the note-taking sheet that is relevant to both Part B1 and Part B2. Candidates may need to spend a little bit more time to ‘screen out’ information that is unrelated to the tasks they have chosen to attempt.

Part B1 Data File

The Part B1 Data File contains the same number of items as its Part B2 counterpart but is shorter and easier. Graphical sources include a poster for the Mars Experience Room (page 8) and a calendar (page 10). These should be easy to understand even for the less able candidates. For each of the tasks, the instructional email specifies the sources that candidates should refer to, further lowering the level of difficulty. Compared to 2019, however, this year’s Part B1 Data File contains more sources that are written in paragraph form (instead of point form), such as a letter of complaint (page 5) and the page-length minutes of a meeting (page 6). The latter is worth noting also because it contains information for all three tasks, which is rather rare.

Part B1 Task 5

‘Traditionally’, Task 5 required no extended writing but this ‘tradition’ has been broken. The guided task this year is Task 7, which means that a candidate who decides to finish the tasks in order will not have an easier task to ease himself/herself into this part of the examination. In fact, this task is somewhat ‘novel’ as it represents the first time candidates are asked to write a video script, even though that is in many ways similar to a speech. Weaker candidates who are accustomed to a gap-filling task may be caught off guard here.

It is not hard to locate the content points since the instructional email clearly specifies, in bullet points, what to include in each section of the video script. However, candidates are likely to find scoring high in Appropriacy a challenge. They have to understand that they are writing a script for a video that will be played before campers enter the Mars Experience Room. The language ought to be informal and welcoming as the campers are children. Considering that participants of the activity take on the role of astronauts, the best candidates would almost certainly include a short ‘welcome message’, e.g. ‘Welcome to Mars’, and end their scripts by wishing the ‘astronauts’ all the best in their adventures. Those who are familiar with theme park rides may actually be at an advantage!

Part B1 Task 6

Task 6 requires candidates to respond to a letter of complaint from a parent whose daughter joined a camp but was dissatisfied. The parent has three complaints which have to be addressed separately. Again, the challenge is not really about locating the content points, which are rather obvious, but writing in a formal and business-like tone and avoiding ‘traps’ in the Data File.

As this is a formal letter, a proper opening (Dear Mrs Liu) and closing (Yours sincerely, Nico Lin) are necessary. More importantly, candidates have to be aware that the purpose of their response is not to further provoke anger, but to clarify and address the issues raised by the parent. Therefore, they must be extra careful when handling the email exchange (page 7), where the daughter is described as ‘a bit of a troublemaker’ and that ‘there is nothing wrong’ with the food served to her. Including these expressions in the letter would be counter-productive, adversely affecting the Appropriacy score.

Part B1 Task 7

In Task 7, candidates have to complete an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page for the company website by extracting information from the Data File to answer questions about the adventure camps offered. The task is not demanding and candidates should have no trouble, though it is specified that they have to write in complete sentences, which was not the case in the guided task (Task 5) in 2018 and 2019. When providing answers, candidates should be concise and eschew unnecessary details. For example, they only have to mention that children will be brought to the Tsing Shan Hospital in case of emergencies. There is no need to include information about renovation work at another hospital. Likewise, alluding to a past participant who showed up in school uniform and smart shoes would be awkward when explaining what participants should wear. Candidates should also pay attention to the target audience of the web page. Since it is for parents, the third person (instead of the second) should be used when referring to the participants.

Part B2 Data File

The Part B2 Data File is considerably more complex than that for Part B1. In line with usual practice, the instructional email does not specify all sources that candidates have to consult to complete each task, instead suggesting a ‘starting point’ only. The minutes (page 5), while relatively long, are quite easy to read as each section is relevant to one and only one task. The ‘engineering assessment’ (page 9) contains a diagram that candidates have to interpret and put into words for Task 9. The ‘medical examination form’ (page 6) is worth mentioning since it is in fact a transcript complete with descriptions.

Part B2 Task 8

An interesting feature of this year’s Paper 3 is that Task 5 in Part B1 and Task 8 in Part B2 (the first task in each section) are extremely similar. Both require candidates to write a script for a video introducing a camp activity to children. The content points required for Task 8 are mostly derived from the instructions used last year (page 6) and the suggested changes based on the instructors’ feedback (page 7). Candidates must read the two sources in parallel and note down all the deletions and changes needed. They cannot copy the instructors’ feedback verbatim.

As mentioned above, this text type may appear ‘novel’ but is actually very similar to a speech. The Appropriacy requirements are identical to those that apply in Task 5: the target audience being children, the script should be informal and friendly; the speaker should welcome the participants at the beginning and wish them good luck at the end.

Part B2 Task 9

Task 9 is an internal report on an accident that occurred to a participant at the campsite due to machine failure. Candidates need to outline the accident, explain its causes and offer suggestions. To do this task well, candidates have to read the ‘engineering assessment’ (page 9) carefully, put the cross-section diagram into words and rewrite in paragraph form the information given in point form. They also have to read the transcript in the medical examination form and summarize what happened to the girl in a formal and concise manner. The most difficult content point is perhaps the fact that the micro cracks in the roof should be sealed *with a silicon sealant*. The information in italics is not in the engineering assessment (where the other content points are) but in the meeting minutes (page 5). Candidates should be aware that they sometimes have to refer to more than one source for a single content point, which is fast becoming the norm in Part B2.

Reports, whether or not they are explicitly named as such, have appeared in Part B2 of every Paper 3 since 2016 and candidates must be acquainted with the conventions, e.g. a title and headings, so that their work is readable and coherent. Unfamiliarity with the text type will result in a loss of marks in the Coherence and Organisation as well as the Appropriacy domains.

Part B2 Task 10

In Task 10, candidates have to write a formal email to politely decline a charity’s request to borrow a replica space capsule. Even though formal correspondence is frequently tested in Paper 3, candidates had only had to write letters or emails to make requests, give information or respond to concerns or complaints prior to this year. Never had they been asked to decline a request. Candidates of average ability and below may struggle to maintain a formal yet (slightly) apologetic tone which involves acknowledging the value of the charity’s work but at the same time stating clearly that their request cannot be acceded to.

As is the case of Task 9, there is one ‘tricky’ content point which requires information from two sources—Trillion Choi is not just any gold medallist at the Olympics (from the recording), but a *gymnastics* gold medallist (page 10). Another issue is that candidates may include irrelevant content, such as the company’s ‘dire financial situation’, the difficulties with repairing the space capsule should it be damaged while on loan, allowing those children to join the Open Day means that there would be ‘no extra expense to us’, etc.

HKDSE Paper 3 Statistics (2012–2020)

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
2020	16	13	13	10	52	18	18	17	53	18	18	17	53
Average	14.1	13.7	14.4	13	55.2	16.6	18.2	18	52.8	18.9	17.3	17.2	53.4

Task Completion Marks & 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	14	9	12	9	15	9	15	9	13	9	14
2013	16	16	9	9	9	18	9	13	9	9	9	13
2014	14	14	9	9	9	10	9	15	9	11	9	10
2015	16	16	9	10	9	12	9	12	9	11	9	13
2016	16	16	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	11	9	12
2017	13	13	10	10	8	8	13	13	9	9	7	7
2018	12	12	9	9	11	11	13	13	7	7	8	8
2019	14	14	10	10	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9
2020	9	9	9	9	14	14	9	9	9	9	8	8

Word Limit (Part B)

Year	Part B1				Part B2			
	Task 5	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
2020	100	150	—	250	150	150	200	500

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
2020	10	1,433	10	1,901
Average	9	1,303	9.8	1,952