

ATTENTION

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HKDSE English Language Exam Analysis Report 2021 (Papers 1–3)

Go Beyond the Limits! Skills for success!

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2021 HKDSE · Paper 1 (Reading)

Reading Passages

The 2021 Paper 1 is similar to its 2019 and 2020 counterparts in that the three sections (A, B1 and B2) are not thematically linked. The majority of the reading passages (Part A: Texts 1 and 3; Part B1: Texts 4 and 5; Part B2: Text 6) are original material. Part A Text 2 and Part B2 Text 7 are heavily adapted from authentic texts. This represents a departure from usual practice since previous papers were largely based on actual print or online material.

Part A

	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
Text Type	Restaurant review	Article	Newsletter article
Topic	Review of a restaurant and food truck called the <i>Food Garage</i>	Multinational packaged-food companies losing money due to a change in customers' preferences	Sustainability in the sourcing of food
Title	Parking up at the Food Garage	The War on Big Food	Newsletter - The Sustainability Plan of Star Resort, Singapore
Word Count	338	278	384
Questions	11	12	4
Marks	17	13	12

Part A comprises three texts on food. Text 1 is a short review of a restaurant and food truck called the *Food Garage*. Text 2 is a short article on 'Big Food'—multinational packaged-food companies—losing money because of a change in customers' preferences. Text 3 is an article extracted from a fictitious corporate newsletter, which gives three proposals for greater sustainability in the sourcing of food.

Number of passages: In 2021, there are three Part A passages, which is more than any previous HKDSE paper. Prior to this year, there had been six papers with one Part A passage (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2020) and three papers with two (2015, 2016 and 2018).

Text type: There is a variety of text types in Part A this year. While Text 2, a feature article, should be familiar, Texts 1 and 3 may be slightly more 'foreign' to some candidates. Text 1 is the first restaurant review to appear in Part A (even though there was a restaurant review in Part B1 in 2016) and contains informal, descriptive language. Text 3 is a corporate newsletter article similar to an internal report, albeit less formal.

Topic: This year's passages are on the broad theme of food. Obviously, this is something that every candidate should have a good understanding of. Texts 2 and 3 deal with customers' changing attitudes towards processed food and food sustainability, respectively. Candidates may have related personal experiences or have studied the issues in Liberal Studies classes, so they should be able to grasp the main ideas.

Level of difficulty: In general, candidates find multiple shorter texts easier to read than one long text. Since this year's Part A has three texts, one may safely say that candidates' cognitive load is reduced. This does not mean, however, that this part would be a breeze for everybody. Texts 1 and 2 are written in a relatively informal style and the words used may be unfamiliar to those who are accustomed to formal language as unfamiliar. Examples include 'turning out fast food that promised not to send you to a fast grave', 'The flavours were moreish in the extreme', 'The knock-out was the hot dog' (Text 1) and 'If any one of these terms raised a hair on the back of your neck, left a sour taste in your mouth, or made your lips purse with disdain' (Text 2).

 Part B1

	Text 4	Text 5
Text Type	Forum thread	Flyer
Topic	Putting plants around the entrance of a housing estate	Information about plants
Title	Improving our housing estate	Possible plants for the residents of the housing estate
Word Count	687	307
Questions	16	3
Marks	26	16

Part B1 comprises a forum thread (Text 4) on improving the environment of a housing estate by adding plants and a flyer (Text 5) in the form of a table providing information about the plants that may be chosen for the housing estate.

Number of passages: Like last year, 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—a forum thread and a flyer—are both very accessible and familiar, but this is the first time that either text type has appeared in the HKDSE reading paper. They are more commonly found in the Data File of the listening paper.

Topic: Both passages address the theme of plants. While some candidates may not have any planting experience, the concepts presented, such as how much water and sunlight a plant needs and whether it is suitable for families with children, are easy to understand.

Level of difficulty: 2021 HKDSE candidates who attempted Part B1 should have had no major trouble going through the passages. Text 4, the forum thread, is generally easy to follow as each post is short and the posters sometimes refer to each other by name (e.g. paragraph 6, line 24: ‘Girlgeorgy, I really don’t care ...’). As long as candidates pay attention to who the poster is (most of them post more than once), they should be able to understand each person’s suggestions and concerns. Text 5, the flyer, is in bullet point form and therefore an easy read. Having said that, there are occasionally relatively advanced or technical vocabulary items in Part B1 that weaker candidates may not understand, e.g. ‘livened up’, ‘climbers’, ‘vibrant’, ‘excessive’, ‘circulate’ (Text 4); ‘tolerates’, ‘sap’ (Text 5).

 **Part B2**

	Text 6	Text 7	Text 8
Text Type	Excerpt from an article	Article	Transcript (dialogue)
Topic	Apollo 11 lunar mission	Terraforming Mars	Terraforming Mars
Word Count	139	378	519
Questions	5	7	8
Marks	6	14	22

Part B2 comprises three texts on space exploration. Text 6 is a short excerpt from an article on the Apollo 11 lunar mission, Text 7 is a short feature article on proposals to terraform Mars, i.e. altering its climate and atmosphere so that they resemble the Earth's. Text 8 is a transcript of a dialogue between two professors who have opposing views on terraforming Mars.

Number of passages: Part B2 in 2021, with three texts, is tied with 2016 for the greatest number of reading passages. Prior to this year, there had been 6 papers with one Part B2 passage (2013, 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2020) and 2 papers with two Part B2 passages (2012 and 2018).

Text type: All three Part B2 texts this year are ordinary articles whose authors do not really have a voice. This makes them relatively straightforward in terms of text type, especially when compared to 2019 and 2020, where the texts had a distinct personal voice and a great deal of self-deprecating humour, sarcasm, etc.

Topic: The theme of space exploration is not entirely foreign to candidates. In fact, many should be familiar with Neil Armstrong's remark ('One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind') in Text 6. Text 7 is more technical in nature as the terraforming process is outlined, but it is still much more accessible than Text 8, where the professors discuss environmental and ethical issues pertaining to that initiative. Those who have little exposure to moral debates may fail to grapple with the arguments raised.

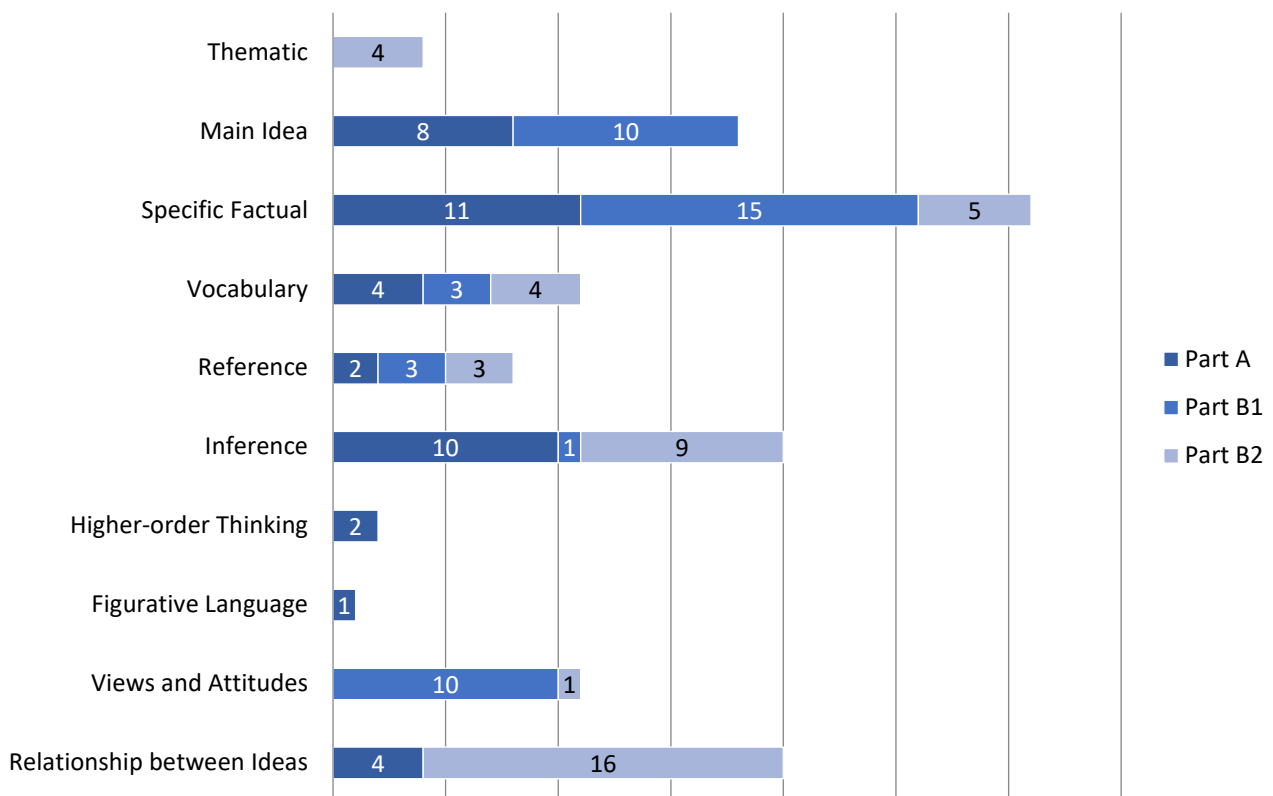
Level of difficulty: As expected, the Part B2 passages contain a considerable number of advanced vocabulary items, e.g. 'intrepid', 'culmination', 'celestial' (Text 6); 'unrelenting', 'ingenuity', 'mimic', 'apparatus' (Text 7); 'ethicists', 'havens', 'flora and fauna', 'dire', 'intrinsic moral worth', 'endemic ecosystems', 'meddling' (Text 8). Text 8 is unquestionably the most challenging because it revolves around philosophical arguments for and against terraforming Mars. Professor Lee believes that it is not ethical to interfere with other planets as extraterrestrial life 'deserves valuation equal to that of our world', whereas Professor Cheung sees human beings as the only species able to make the Earth and other planets better places and therefore supports the terraforming proposals. These arguments may be familiar to educated adults but are likely to elude the average candidate.

Questions

Question Types

Specific factual questions remain the most common type of questions to appear in Paper 1. A candidate who attempts Parts A and B1 can get a maximum of 26 marks by getting all the specific factual questions right. There is a large number of inference questions in Parts A and B2, taking up a total of 19 marks. Questions that test students' understanding of the relationship between ideas seem to have become more common, especially in Part B2 (16 marks).

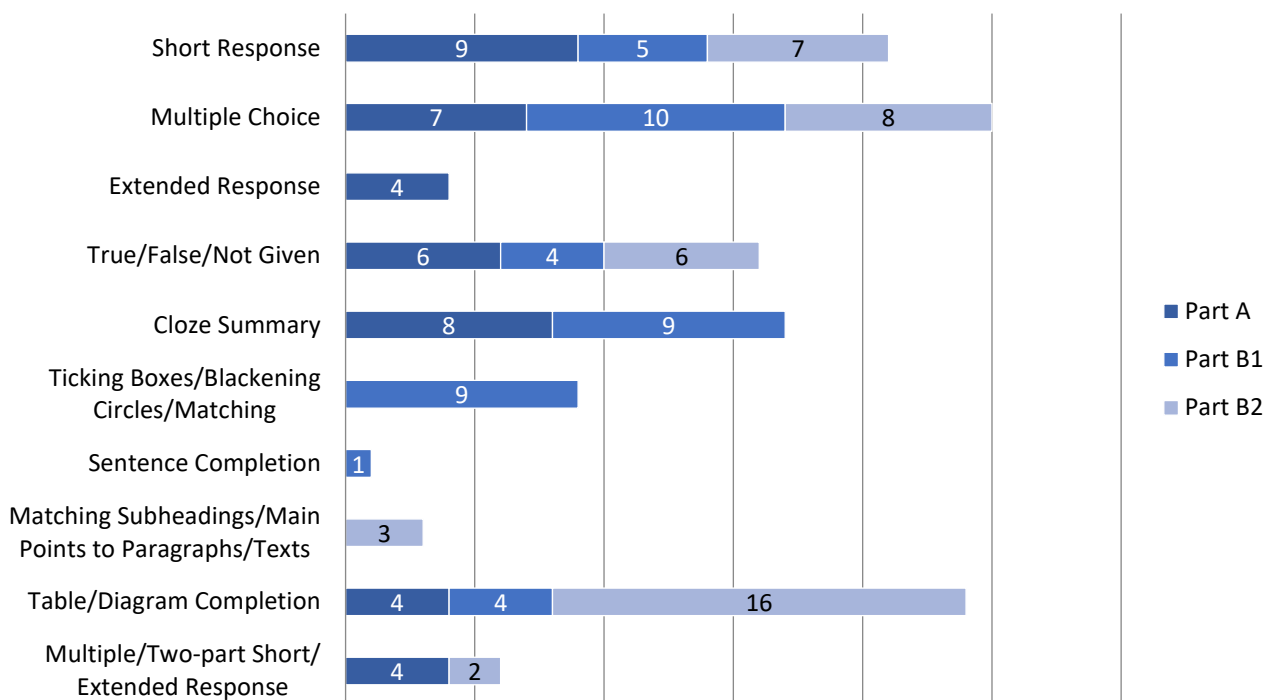
Question Type	Part A [42 marks]	Part B1 [42 marks]	Part B2 [42 marks]
Thematic	—	—	Q58, Q66 [3]
Main Idea	Q11 [4], Q27 [4]	Q39, Q44 [9]	—
Specific Factual	Q3, Q4 [3], Q14, Q20 [2], Q22, Q25 [3]	Q28, Q29, Q30, Q40, Q41 [4], Q45 [4], Q46 [3]	Q53, Q54, Q56, Q63 [2]
Vocabulary	Q7 [2], Q15, Q24	Q32, Q36, Q37	Q48, Q51, Q55, Q61
Reference	Q1, Q5	Q31, Q33, Q38	Q60, Q62, Q64
Inference	Q2, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13, Q16, Q17, Q23	Q34	Q47, Q49, Q50 [2], Q52, Q63 [4]
Higher-order Thinking	Q18, Q19	—	—
Figurative Language	Q21	—	—
Views and Attitudes	—	Q35, Q42 [4], Q43 [5]	Q59
Relationship between Ideas	Q26 [4]	—	Q57 [8], Q65 [8]



Question Formats

As expected, 2021 Paper 1 is comprised mainly of short response and multiple-choice questions. Part B2, being the most difficult section, is usually where most extended response questions are, but this year is an exception. There is only one extended response question in Part B2, which means the section does appear to be less challenging than usual, especially when compared to Part A, which has six. There is a relatively large number of marks allocated to true/false/not given questions (10 if Part B1 is attempted and 12 if Part B2 is attempted) and table completion questions (8 if Part B1 is attempted and 20 if Part B2 is attempted).

Question Format	Part A [42 marks]	Part B1 [42 marks]	Part B2 [42 marks]
Short Response	Q6, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q22, Q24	Q29, Q31, Q33, Q36, Q37	Q48, Q51, Q52, Q55, Q60, Q61, Q62
Multiple Choice	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q16, Q17, Q21	Q28, Q30, Q32, Q35, Q38, Q39, Q40, Q46 [3]	Q47, Q49, Q53, Q54, Q56, Q58, Q59, Q64
Extended Response	Q8, Q18, Q19, Q23	—	—
True/False/Not Given	Q4 [3], Q25 [3]	Q41 [4]	Q63 [6]
Cloze Summary	Q11 [4], Q27 [4]	Q44 [9]	—
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	—	Q42 [4], Q43 [5]	—
Sentence Completion	—	Q34	—
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	—	—	Q66 [3]
Table/Diagram Completion	Q26 [4]	Q45 [4]	Q57 [8], Q65 [8]
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	Q7 [2], Q20 [2]	—	Q50 [2]



Noteworthy Questions and Recommendations

Part A

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
6, 8	These are inference questions. Question 6 asks what the pizzas from the late-night deliveries are usually like, when it is mentioned that the restaurant/food truck being reviewed serves pizzas that ‘consisted of a thin crust and a light layer of cheese’. To get the answer, candidates have to ‘say the opposite’: most pizzas have a thick crust and a heavy layer of cheese. Similarly, Question 8 asks about how the writer feels about fast food in general. Given the word ‘guilt-free’ used to describe this restaurant/food truck that stands out from the rest, candidates should infer that dining at other fast-food outlets makes the writer feel ‘guilty’, i.e. the food served is considered unhealthy.	Candidates should be trained to make inferences by ‘filling in the blanks’ or completing meanings by themselves.
10	This question asks what ‘parking up’ means in the title, which is ‘Parking up at the Food Garage’. This tests candidates’ understanding of the pun: a garage is where vehicles are parked but this ‘garage’ is a restaurant/food truck. Diners who visit the place are likened to cars which are parked up at a ‘garage’. The answer is therefore ‘dining’, ‘eating’, ‘having a meal’, etc.	Stronger candidates should be encouraged to read authentic texts that use literary devices (metaphors, similes, irony, sarcasm and puns). Short exercises on witty titles could be assigned too.
11, 26, 27	These questions are in the cloze summary or table completion format and require candidates to fill in each blank grammatically based on the content of selected paragraphs. They are relatively straightforward as the instructions specify that all answers must come from the text. For Question 26, candidates need to use at most two words per blank. This is similar to Question 11 in 2020, which specified that each answer should be no more than three words long.	Candidates should be reminded to always read the instructions carefully and check whether the answers can all be directly lifted and how many words are needed per blank.
13	This is an inference question. Candidates need to make a sensible guess as to what the purpose of the ‘simple test’ is, based on such textual hints as ‘If any one of these terms [canned food, pre-packaged lunch, etc.] raised a hair on the back of your neck’. To get the answer right, candidates should consider the overall message of the text: ‘Big Food’ is losing market share because people prefer fresh and organic alternatives. The test is therefore to find out whether products by ‘Big Food’ (multinational packaged-food companies) are losing favour, becoming less popular, etc.	—
18	This is a higher-order thinking question. Candidates should try to understand the comparison by considering the characteristics of a ‘melting iceberg’. An iceberg is large in size but one that is melting will disappear. Putting this back into the context of ‘Big Food’, candidates can infer that the comparison is to highlight how those companies are large in scale but are losing traction and becoming ‘less relevant’, which is stated in the text.	When explaining the use of a metaphor or simile, candidates should consider the images that are conjured up and point out the similarities between the metaphor or simile and the person or thing being described.

 **Part B1**

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
34	This is an inference question. Candidates have to explain what Crustyclown means by 'You are all dreaming'. They should first identify the referent of the pronoun 'you'—the previous posters who support the idea of having plants at the entrance of the housing estate—then the answer will be obvious: he/she is saying that it is not a good idea.	—
46	This question asks candidates to recommend plants to three individuals, each of whom has many 'special requests'. For example, Mrs Chan has two young children, loves taking care of plants, wants to put plants in her living room (which receives no direct sunlight) and does not prefer a flowering plant.	Candidates could make brief notes (e.g. ticks and crosses) next to each description to ensure that the option that they choose ticks all the boxes.

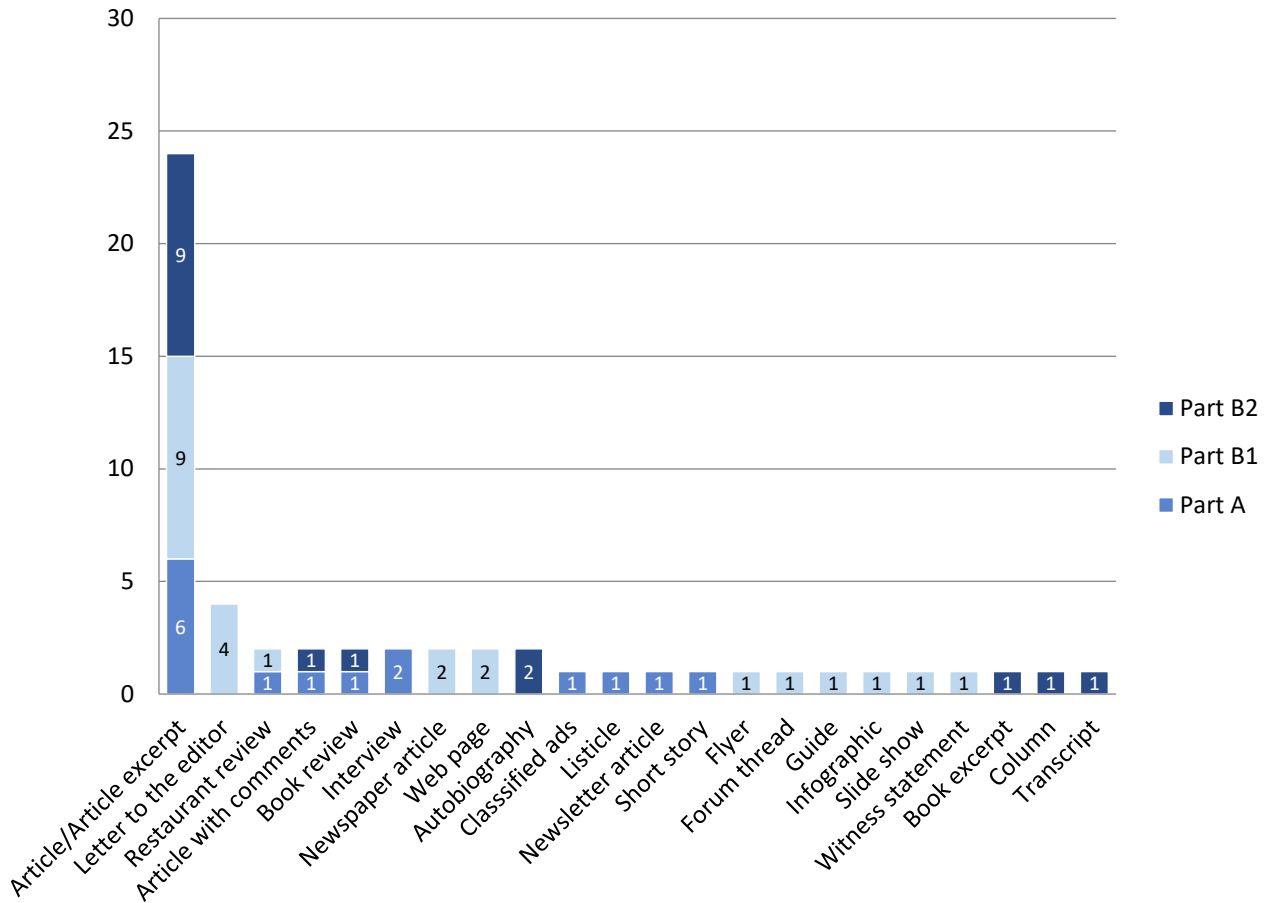
 **Part B2**

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
50	This question asks candidates what Neil Armstrong's famous remark means. In fact, some might be able to give the correct answer without looking at the text. Candidates need to understand that those words were said as the astronaut stepped out of the lunar lander onto the Moon, and explain the terms 'man' (Armstrong) and 'mankind' (human civilization). Hopefully, they will know that the first part ('one small step for man') should be interpreted literally whereas the second part ('one giant leap for mankind') metaphorically.	Stronger candidates could be trained to write the literal and metaphorical meanings of particular utterances in concise language in preparation for similar questions.
63	This question contains what is probably the toughest set of true/false/not given statements in HKDSE history. Part (ii)—'Prof. Cheung believes that the planetary park system would solve the ethical problems related to exploring other planets'—may appear to be true at first glance but is actually false. Professor Lee criticizes the terraforming plans from an ethical perspective, i.e. 'we cannot simply land on other planets because we want to satisfy our need for more land', but Professor Cheung responds with a scientific argument, i.e. the planetary park system would prevent destruction of the environment. He did not directly address Professor Lee's ethical concerns. Part (iii)—'Prof. Lee believes that the landing of spacecraft could cause the spread of microorganisms across the surface of the planet'—is another point of contention. She mentions dust storms that can spread microorganisms across the planetary surface to counter Professor Cheung's planetary park system proposal, but it is not mentioned what causes these dust storms. In fact, they are natural occurrences on many planets. The answer is therefore 'not given'.	Diagnostic true/false/not given practices may be assigned to candidates, strong and weak. They should be reminded to read entire statements and scrutinize every single word. Candidates who overlook 'ethical' in part (ii) and 'the landing of spacecraft could cause ...' in part (iii) are very likely to lose the marks.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
65	<p>This is a relationship between ideas question set in the table completion format. Candidates are required to identify the main argument of each paragraph and the supporting reason or example. While the paragraphs are not long and the answers are not hard to find, candidates whose language foundation is shaky risk losing all eight marks since the instructions specify that answers must be grammatically correct. This is the first time HKDSE candidates have been asked to provide sentential (as opposed to phrasal or lexical) answers that are grammatically correct.</p>	<p>Teachers should inculcate in students a habit of writing grammatically in the reading paper even though that is usually not required.</p>

HKDSE Paper 1 Statistics (2012–2021)

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
2021	3	2	3
Average	1.5	2.4	1.7

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
2021	1,000 (338+278+384)	994 (687+307)	1,037 (139+379+519)
Average	1,032	925	1,135

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
2021	27	42	19	42	20	42
Average	23	43	23	42	24	42

Question Types

Parts A+B1

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Thematic	2	1	1	2	0	0	3	2	2	0
Main Idea	6	3	1	12	7	2	4	6	7	18
Specific Factual	13	21	28	10	17	25	15	11	36	26
Vocabulary	4	2	4	4	3	8	6	4	4	7
Reference	3	3	6	5	4	2	6	6	5	5
Inference	10	12	16	12	7	2	8	6	8	11
Higher-order Thinking	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Figurative Language	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	4	4	1
Views and Attitudes	1	0	0	4	5	1	0	1	9	10
Sequencing	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	4	0
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	4

Parts A+B2

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Thematic	1	1	0	3	0	1	2	1	0	4
Main Idea	9	6	3	13	8	2	4	4	11	8
Specific Factual	10	14	20	3	13	21	8	9	21	16
Vocabulary	8	2	1	5	5	2	8	6	2	8
Reference	4	3	9	5	2	1	4	7	5	5
Inference	14	12	18	13	12	9	14	10	12	19
Higher-order Thinking	3	2	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	2
Figurative Language	1	2	3	3	3	2	7	3	6	1
Views and Attitudes	2	0	0	5	3	1	0	2	13	1
Sequencing	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	0
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	20



Question Formats

Parts A+B1

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Short Response	10	13	26	30	13	12	14	11	9	14
Multiple Choice	11	9	11	7	13	13	11	10	11	17
Extended Response	1	4	5	2	6	7	7	1	3	4
True/False/Not Given	2	4	4	2	2	2	2	3	10	10
Cloze Summary	2	3	0	1	4	3	4	3	10	17
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	1	3	1	0	1	2	3	3	7	9
Sentence Completion	3	1	2	0	0	0	2	4	4	1
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	0
Labelling Pictures	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	11	8
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	1	2	4
Sequencing	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	0
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	9	0
Proofreading	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	0
Timeline Completion	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0

Parts A+B2

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Short Response	17	11	26	24	17	6	17	13	9	16
Multiple Choice	15	11	11	6	13	9	11	9	11	15
Extended Response	9	7	4	5	7	7	9	6	7	4
True/False/Not Given	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	8	12
Cloze Summary	2	4	1	2	1	1	5	2	5	8
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	12	0
Sentence Completion	1	0	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	0
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	4	3
Labelling Pictures	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	10	20
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	3	4	6
Sequencing	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	0
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	5	0
Proofreading	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	0
Timeline Completion	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0

2021 HKDSE · Paper 2 (Writing)

Part A

Question 1

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
1	Announcement	School fair organizer	Fellow students	Semi-formal

Part A often sees new text types and this year’s question marks the first time that HKDSE candidates have been asked to write an announcement. However, there is not a lot of novelty because this announcement is in many ways similar to a speech. Candidates have to assume the role of the organizer of an annual school fair and speak at a school assembly to introduce the event, describe the activities that will be held as part of the fair and inform fellow students (the audience) of possible ways to help out. A promotional poster is attached to guide candidates in brainstorming ideas. The name of the school, date and time of the event, list of activities, ticket price and email address of a contact person are provided. The sheer number of pointers has a number of implications on the content. Most candidates, including those who normally struggle to generate ideas, should have no trouble staying on task because all the requirements can be fulfilled even if the candidate relies heavily on the prompt. In a sense, the question is comparable to a Paper 3 Part B task. Nonetheless, it does not follow that getting a Level 5 or above would be easy. In fact, a stronger candidate would have to go the extra mile in order to stand out. For a start, they must not only list the given activities; a detailed and enticing description of two or three activities would be preferable. When introducing the event at the beginning of the announcement, they could do worse than mentioning the objectives and/or briefly chronicling the history of this annual event. In the closing where the speaker calls on students to take part as volunteers, the various positions that are available, e.g. game helpers, ticketing officers, could be specified to add to the authenticity of the announcement.

A semi-formal style is appropriate because the announcement is to be delivered at a school assembly also attended by the Principal and teachers, but is mainly for students, who need persuading. Candidates should be careful not to use any grandiose stock expressions as they would be out of place. On the other hand, the fun fair being a serious school event, overly informal language or excessive use of rhetorical questions should be avoided.

Part A General Observations and Recommendations

Part A is a guided short writing task. Apart from the words that make up the question, candidates are almost always provided with additional prompts that mandate or suggest ideas to be included. The poster this year, the aspects of a dining experience (food, service, dining environment and price) in 2020 and the mind map in 2018 are but a few examples. Candidates of different abilities should be instructed to approach these informative, or rather, constraining, prompts differently. Weaker students should develop an awareness of whether they have ‘ticked all the boxes’, i.e. made full use of the prompt, so as to minimize the chance of having large ‘gaps’ in their content, whereas the average student or the high-flyer should think out of the box and ask themselves: What flexibility do I have in interpreting the prompt? Are there ‘gaps’ in the prompt that I can ‘fill in’? They should always bear in mind that the top marks are usually only awarded to those who exceed requirements and demonstrate impressive creativity.

While this year’s compulsory question does not involve personal experience, as was the focus in many previous examinations, the ability to write in an informal and personal way remains important. Students could be encouraged to write about their daily life, family, school activities, etc. on a regular basis, and even incorporate personal anecdotes in more ‘serious’ texts, such as letters to the editor and school magazine articles, where appropriate.

Part B

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
2	Letter to the editor	Not specified	Readers of the <i>Hong Kong Post</i>	Formal
3	Email	A member of the sales department at a retail company	The sales manager	Formal
4	Job application letter	A professional athlete	The human resources manager of the Hong Kong Sports Foundation	Formal
5	Argumentative essay	Not specified	Not specified	Formal
6	Blog post	A blogger	Readers of the blog	Informal
7	Short story	Not specified	Judges of the short story contest	Not applicable
8	Essay	A student	The teacher	Formal
9	Letter	An aspiring screenwriter	The production manager of TV-Station X	Formal

Question 2: Social Issues

This is the first letter to the editor question since 2017 (Questions 5 and 9). It is set in a conventional problem-solution format. Candidates are presented with the problem of the sales of electric cars being low. They are asked to identify the causes of the problem and suggest how people may be encouraged to drive these vehicles.

The familiarity of the topic means that candidates should have no trouble coming up with relevant ideas, but the points presented in scripts across a wide range of abilities may be exceedingly similar. The reasons why electric cars have not gained currency are certainly cost-related. Whether it is convenient to charge and park such vehicles also affects buyers' decision. The solutions corresponding to these causes are very obvious. To do well, candidates ought to demonstrate an informed understanding of the issue by naming relevant brands, describing the dearth of charging stations in the city, highlighting the limited range of the vehicles, etc. Those who merely present an idea (e.g. 'the cost is high') and immediately jump to the conclusion (e.g. 'buyers will not be interested') will not be awarded the top marks. Candidates can also be encouraged to include some personal experiences when elaborating on certain arguments as some letters to the editor do have a personal dimension; after all, they are written by individuals who feel compelled to opine on a social issue.

Question 3: Workplace Communication

This question is set in a workplace context. Candidates assume the role of a sales associate and are required to write an email to their supervisor (the sales manager) to report on customer complaints about the no-exchange/no-refund policy and suggest changes. At the end, they should also outline how the company can prevent customers from taking advantage of the new, presumably more flexible, exchange and refund policy.

Candidates must write in a measured, tactful style so as not to offend their supervisor. In particular, they should not be overconfident, lecture the reader or try to force changes to corporate policy. Everything should be presented as suggestions (e.g. 'could' instead of 'should') and some hedging would be preferable. While this email is similar to a problem-solution essay in terms of structure, the design of the question provides room for candidates to exercise their creativity. Strong scripts will probably be characterized by believable details about the current policy (e.g. merchandise can only be exchanged if a long list of conditions are met), excerpts from written complaints by customers as well as concrete suggestions for improvement.

Question 4: Sports Communication

This question requires candidates to write a job application letter. This is a new text type in the DSE writing paper, though in 2018, those who attempted Question 8 had to write a letter to apply to a summer programme. Candidates are given the role of a professional athlete who seeks a career change and wishes to become a coach at the Hong Kong Sports Foundation. They have to introduce themselves (including their athletic history) and explain their interest and suitability.

The prompt provides some pointers as to what may be mentioned in the letter, in the form of the job's main duties. When trying to 'market' themselves as a suitable choice, candidates ought to discuss how they can contribute in all three areas. They may, for example, say that they have been involved in multiple training programmes over the years and have a good understanding of what makes a programme effective. Candidates who can link the applicant's experience, achievements, interests, etc. together to form a coherent whole, as if they were crafting a fictional character, are likely to be able to write a letter that convinces. Language-wise, candidates may want to make use of a number of expressions that are commonly found in cover letters, e.g. 'I am writing to apply for ...', 'I believe I am a suitable candidate because ...', 'I would be grateful if an interview could be arranged ...'.

Question 5: Debating

This is a typical argumentative essay question on whether social media influencers are more trustworthy than traditional media advertisements. Candidates have to choose one side of the argument and provide reasons to support their view.

Young people who use social media extensively and are aware of the activities of key opinion leaders (KOLs) probably have a lot to say about the topic. However, they must not overlook the importance of drawing comparisons between social media and traditional media in each body paragraph. The best scripts are likely to contain ample examples of products promoted by KOLs and/or via traditional means.

Question 6: Popular Culture

This question requires candidates to write a blog post about their experience of taking part in a social media challenge called 'The 21-day Gratitude Challenge'. The scope of the text is clearly laid out by the instructions: they are expected to discuss their motivations and objectives, then reflect on the whole challenge and explain how it has changed them.

Candidates should decide, before they start to write, whether or not to produce a chronological account. Many may be tempted to, but they need to consider whether that is an effective way to present their reflections since their blog posts may contain a lot of mundane details and their reflections, which appear at the end, are likely to be shallow. A more focused reflection-based account, where each body paragraph focuses on one takeaway and includes experiences as examples, would be much more engaging to the readers. Candidates should also remember that a blog is supposed to be interactive (there are 'real' readers and some sort of interaction is expected). They can talk to their readers, ask questions, invite comments 'below', etc.

Question 7: Short Stories

This question requires candidates to write, as an entry in a short story contest, a horror story about a security guard on duty at night. Four pictures are given for the easy generation of ideas.

As is the case of any short story question, candidates are given free rein as to the characters, plot and message (if any), so long as they meet certain requirements. The security guard depicted in the pictures, for example, may have paranormal experiences or get caught in serious criminal activities. Whether a story is good very much depends on the creation of suspense and a believable plot line, as well as the range and suitability of the descriptive vocabulary.

Question 8: Poems and Songs

This question provides a simple poem as prompt. Candidates are required to write an essay on the differences between old and new friendships and whether the former is better than the latter.

While the question does not mandate references to the poem in a candidate's essay, it would be unwise of them to ignore the textual input entirely. Regardless of the candidate's opinion (whether old friendships are better), they should be able to respond to such points as 'Friendships that have stood the test ... are surely

best'. Generic points, e.g. 'old friends know you better', should be eschewed in favour of concrete personal (or famous) examples that illustrate each argument. The inclusion of personal stories, however, does not necessitate an informal style; candidates should bear in mind that essays are formal texts.

Question 9: Drama

This is another question involving the writing of a formal letter. Candidates have to assume the role of an aspiring screenwriter and pitch their idea for a TV drama series to a TV station production manager. The focus of the proposed production—three generations of a family—is clearly given by the textual and pictorial prompts.

As specified by the question, candidates should introduce the characters, plot and setting of the TV drama. It may not be necessary to spell out every single detail (including the ending of the story), but a clear plot summary and basic information about all important characters (personality, etc.) are a must. In crafting the plot, candidates should include at least one conflict and consider the message that they want to bring out. While they should be confident in the feasibility of their ideas (e.g. 'I am sure viewers aged 35 or above will be able to relate to this theme'), they should adopt a professional tone (e.g. 'It would be much appreciated if you would take my suggestion into account') in order not to sound arrogant.

Part B General Observations and Recommendations

Since 2019, bullet points and pictorial prompts (some more useful than others) have become the norm in Part B of the writing paper. Apart from the form, it is also pivotal that teachers note the following changes in the substance of the questions. Two key observations can be made:

- **Relevance of elective modules:** The questions have become more closely linked to the elective module that they belong to. This is especially true of the Workplace Communication module. This year, candidates have to write, as an associate, an internal business email to their manager asking for a change in policy. Similarly, in 2020, the question under this module was a letter to apply for internal transfer. Those who are accustomed to writing essays and articles on general issues pertaining to jobs and the workplace may not be as comfortable with the business contexts of the recent questions and the style that they adopt may not be entirely appropriate. Another case in point is the Drama module. The 2021 question requires candidates to propose a drama production, whereas the previous year's called for a description of a Chinese opera that they recently watched. More extensive teaching of elective modules and/or sourcing of relevant, authentic reading materials may be advisable so as to broaden candidates' horizons.
- **Formal texts:** Candidates who hope to do well in this paper must acquaint themselves fully with the conventions of formal writing, including essays, letters to the editor and formal business correspondence. This year, a text type that all teachers and students are very familiar with—letter to the editor—made its first appearance since 2017. Additionally, there are two questions (Questions 5 and 8) requiring an argumentative essay and three questions (Questions 3, 4 and 9) requiring a formal business letter or email. Excluding the short story, only one question lends itself to a relatively less formal register. In other words, there is a marked emphasis on formal texts and candidates should be reminded of their stylistic requirements, e.g. no contractions and sparing use of rhetorical devices.

2021 HKDSE · Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills)

Part A

Part A of Paper 3 in 2021 consists of four short listening tasks on the theme of World Expos. As opposed to the 2020 paper, where candidates were not given an overall context in which they listen to the recordings, this year's paper revolves around a company called Events Horizon and a group of student interns.

Task	Context	Question Formats	Task Type	Marks
1	Three student interns discussing a work schedule	Gap-filling, table	Note sheet	16
2	A monologue by a professor on the history of World Expos	Gap-filling	Note sheet	15
3	Two student interns giving feedback to another intern about her PowerPoint slides	Gap-filling, lists	PowerPoint slides	12
4	A discussion between the three interns and a friend about World Expos	Q&A	Note sheet	13

Task 1

Task 1 is the easiest task in Part A. Candidates listen to a conversation between three student interns who are preparing for a presentation introducing World Expos. Question formats include note-taking and table-filling. While easier formats such as ticking boxes and multiple-choice are absent, the task should be manageable even for less able candidates. Almost all answers are repeated and consist of only a few words. A considerable number of items (Questions 1, 2, 9 and 12) involve the easy skill of listening for time or date.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
4	The answer is a single word—'boardroom'—which is repeated once. However, to weaker candidates, this may be an unfamiliar word. They may not know that a 'boardroom' is a meeting room.	—
13	As there are two female voices in the recording, some candidates may struggle between 'B' (Bonnie) and 'C' (Cherie), despite a hint: 'Fantastic! Thanks, Cherie!'	Whenever candidates are asked to identify who is responsible for what, clear hints are usually given, usually in the form of somebody calling the person by name (in a somewhat stilted way). Candidates must pay attention to these hints and not rely on 'voice recognition'.

Task 2

In Task 2, candidates listen to a lecture by Professor Leung on the history of World Expos. The fact that the listening input is a monologue could be daunting, but since the task only tests note-taking skills, candidates may find it easier than last year's Task 2, which had pictorial and graph-related questions. It is worth noting that Professor Leung has a New Zealand accent, which may sound slightly 'foreign' to some.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
17	This is a dictation-style item (exact same words required) as candidates have to note down the topic of the lecture. The answer is ‘Bringing People Together’ but ‘bringing’ can easily be misheard as ‘bring’. A subsequent sentence—‘they bring people together’—may mislead candidates too.	Candidates should try their best to write down the answer when they hear it the first time and not rely on repetition as it may be misleading or partial (i.e. not giving the answer in full).
18, 19, 21, 22	Each of the answers must begin with a verb. For instance, ‘the biggest flower in the world’ as an answer to Q21 would be unacceptable as the verb ‘grew’ is missing.	Candidates should study the note-headings carefully. The words ‘roles’ (Q18–Q19) and ‘achievements’ (Q21–Q22) clearly indicate that verbs are required.
31	The cue words (‘so it was considered to be a bit of a failure’) only appears after the answer is given (‘the number of visitors was lower than expected’).	Candidates should make use of the margins to take rough notes when they hear something that may be relevant but are unsure. They should not just ‘wait’ for a cue word to ‘activate’ them.

Task 3

As is the case of Task 2, Task 3 appears to be of a relatively high level of difficulty because no prompts are given for the most part (Questions 32–34 and 37–43). Nonetheless, there is quite a lot of repetition that should assist candidates, especially when they handle Questions 37–43. The task is on a conversation among the three student interns, two of whom give feedback on a draft of some PowerPoint slides to be used for a presentation on World Expos.

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 a conversation among the three student interns and a friend on ‘human zoos’ at World Expos more than a century ago. 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, which may not be repeated in the recording. Another challenge is vocabulary as a number of words could be unfamiliar to the average candidate.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
50	The word ‘primitive’, an essential part of the answer, may be unfamiliar to many candidates.	—
51	Weaker candidates who are unaware of the meaning of the adjective ‘live’ may mistake ‘live exhibit’ for ‘life exhibit’ as the two are homophones.	—
56	Candidates may expect to only have to write down ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in response to the first part of the question (‘Should it be included in presentation?’) and fail to supply the correct answer, i.e. ‘Yes, but only the first half’.	—

Part B

Part B of Paper 3 in 2021 presents candidates with a workplace situation. Candidates assume the role of Nico Lin, who works for Events Horizon and is part of the committee responsible for organizing a professional women’s tennis tournament called Victoria Cup. While Events Horizon is the company on which Part A tasks are based, there is no thematic link between Part A and Part B. 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	Completing a form summarizing special arrangements for the Victoria Cup (a tennis tournament)	Form	—	17
6	Introducing a Tennis Activity Day and persuading the readers to apply for it	Announcement	120	18
7	Responding to a newspaper article about issues with the Victoria Cup	Letter to the editor	150	18
8	Writing to a charity refusing their application to volunteer at the Victoria Cup	Formal email	120	16
9	Responding to a letter to the editor in a newspaper	Letter to the editor	180	19
10	Writing to the PR Department about criticism of a promotional poster and the need for redesigning it	Internal email	150	18

Listening Note-taking Sheet

Candidates listen to a Zoom meeting where Anthony Au (the ‘boss’) speaks with Lara Taranova, a high-ranking tennis player, and Victor Laurent, her agent. This year, there are six note-headings, compared to four in 2019 and 2020. To help candidates organize their notes, some bullet points are given under the first heading. There is one point under the first note-heading that is relevant to both Part B1 and Part B2, which is a rather rare occurrence.

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. Less text-heavy sources include a WhatsApp message (page 8) and a web page containing a table and a chart (page 9). These should be easy to understand even for the less able candidates, though some may have trouble putting the key points in their own words. For each of the tasks, the instructional email specifies the sources that candidates should refer to. Nonetheless, some items (the email exchange on page 5 and the minutes on page 6) contain information for more than one source, increasing candidates’ cognitive load since they have to decide which points are useful for which task.

Part B1 Task 5

Despite the break with ‘tradition’ in 2020, when the guided task requiring no extended writing was Task 7 instead of Task 5, the ‘traditional’ arrangement has returned. Provided that candidates usually finish the tasks in order, this ‘observance’ of ‘tradition’ could prove helpful to the weaker candidates, who need an easier task to ease themselves into this part of the examination.

Task 5 is a form that outlines special arrangements for the tournament, such as how to prevent players from suffering from heat exhaustion and being disturbed by fans. Since the content points that are required are clearly identified by the form and candidates only have to write a few words or a short sentence at a time, the task should pose no trouble. Some less able candidates who tend to struggle when following the recording may lose ‘Task Completion’ marks because quite a few of the ideas (5 out of 15 content points) come from the listening note-taking sheet.

Part B1 Task 6

Task 6 is an announcement about an event called Tennis Activity Day to be posted on the company's website. It is specified in the instructional email that the announcement should 'persuade the readers to apply', so a semi-formal and engaging style should be adopted. The content requirements are spelt out unequivocally in the form of six bullet points, meaning that candidates are unlikely to have problems with locating relevant ideas for 'Task Completion' marks. To obtain higher marks in 'Coherence and Organisation' as well as 'Appropriacy', candidates should come up with a concise title (e.g. 'Join the Tennis Activity Day') and divide the text into paragraphs for easy reading.

Part B1 Task 7

Task 7 requires candidates to write a letter to the editor of the *Hong Kong Press & Journal* in response to a recently published article that criticizes the tournament. While it is necessary to read the article itself to get a better idea of what the problems are, the instructional email is quite helpful in that it identifies for candidates the two major foci of the letter, namely littering and TV options.

As this letter may be read by people who have not seen the previous article, candidates ought to refer to it at the beginning (e.g. 'On behalf of Events Horizon, I am writing to respond to the article entitled "Victoria Cup rubbish" dated 25 April 2021'). Throughout the text, they should remain formal and reassure the public that this year's tournament will be problem-free. Irrelevant content, such as the number of hamburger outlets, should be avoided.

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. There are two transcripts (pages 8 and 10) as well as relatively long texts such as minutes (page 6), a letter to the editor (page 7) and an article with comments (page 9). Whereas in 2019 and 2020 candidates were given diagrams (a cinema in 2019 and motor failure in 2020) to interpret and put into words, there is no such requirement in 2021, which probably makes the Data File easier to comprehend.

Part B2 Task 8

Task 8 requires candidates to write an email informing a charity that their application to provide volunteer ball kids for the tournament is unsuccessful. Correspondence serving such a purpose is rare in HKDSE Paper 3 and only appeared for the first time in 2020 (Task 10: a letter to decline a charity's request to borrow an exhibit); this is the second consecutive year in which candidates have to say 'no' in a diplomatic way. To obtain a high 'Appropriacy' score, candidates should thank the charity for their interest in sending children to serve as volunteers and perhaps acknowledge their contribution to the wider community. They should use their common sense and avoid including remarks for internal documents that would be out of place in an external email, e.g. the 50 complimentary tickets would 'show goodwill' and be 'a nice gesture', volunteer ball kids should be at least 11 years old due to 'possible PR ramifications'. Another potential challenge is synthesizing information. Candidates have to compare the requirements laid down by the volunteer opportunities notice to the organization description (both on page 5) in order to figure out why the charity in question is not a good match.

Part B2 Task 9

In Task 9, candidates have to read a letter to the editor whose author complains about her bad experience at the tournament last year and write another letter to the editor in response to the problems raised. The task design is familiar; as long as candidates can identify the two issues that need to be responded to, they should be able to obtain the 'Task Completion' marks. Two content points from the listening note-taking sheet (members of local tennis club will have priority in booking tickets; any fan who breaks the rules concerning

making noise will be removed from the venue) may be overlooked by those who are unaware that this task has to be completed using information ‘from the B2 Data File and your notes’. Some careless candidates may write a letter to the complainant directly and lose ‘Coherence and Organisation’ and ‘Appropriacy’ marks.

Part B2 Task 10

Task 10 is an internal email from the tournament Project Team to the PR Department criticizing their promotional poster for the tournament, which has come under fire for various reasons. Again, candidates should find the task design familiar. For example, Task 10 in 2018 was an email to inform a graphics designer of problems with his design and suggest improvements.

This task is relatively more challenging as far as the manipulation of Data File sources is concerned. In the interview (page 10), the language used to attack the poster is rather strong (e.g. ‘that’s such a lame thing to put’, ‘which century do you think they’re living in’, ‘there’s no reason in the world why women tennis players should aspire to play like men’), but none of these should appear in the internal email without significant moderation. Candidates should try to make themselves clear but at the same time remain formal and professional in their dealings with their ‘colleagues’ so that their opinions would be taken seriously. In addition, some candidates may say that the ‘highest-ranking player’ is expected to appear on the poster (from the article on page 9), without specifying who that is, i.e. Lara Taranova (from the listening note-taking sheet). They should be reminded that they may be required to combine information from multiple Data File sources to get a ‘Task Completion’ mark.

HKDSE Paper 3 Statistics (2012–2021)

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
2021	16	15	12	13	56	17	18	18	53	16	19	18	53
Average	14.3	13.8	14.2	13	55.3	16.6	18.2	18	52.8	18.6	17.5	17.3	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
2021	15	15	9	9	9	9	7	7	10	10	9	9

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
2021	—	120	150	270	120	180	150	450

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
2021	9	1,342	9	2,078
Average	9	1,307	9.7	1,965