

HKDSE English Language Exam Analysis Report 2024 (Papers 1–3)

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2024 HKDSE · Paper 1 (Reading)

Overview

	Part A		Part B1		Part B2
	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5
Text Type	News report	Feature article	Feature article	Feature article	Book excerpt
Topic	Banyan trees in Hong Kong		Hawkers in Hong Kong		Misconceptions around science and medicine
Title	<i>Government defends axing century-old banyans on safety grounds</i>	<i>A tree worthy of worship: Hong Kong's Banyans</i>	<i>Some old hawkers are still here</i>	—	<i>Bad science</i>
Source	<i>South China Morning Post</i>	<i>Zolima Citymag</i>	<i>South China Morning Post</i>		HarperCollins Publishers
Word Count	247	936	329	637	1,141
Questions	6	17	9	10	20
Marks	9	33	11	31	42

Reading Passages

Part A

Part A comprises two texts: a news report on a government decision to fell some century-old banyan trees (Text 1) and a feature article on why and how banyan trees are ‘worshipped’ in Hong Kong.

Number of passages: So far, there have been eight papers with one Part A passage (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023), four papers with two (2015, 2016, 2018 and 2024) and one paper with three (2021).

Text type: Candidates should be comfortable with news reports on recent events and feature articles on topics of general interest. Text 1 (the news report) is made up of short paragraphs, which ease weaker candidates into the examination.

Topic: This year’s passages deal with banyan trees in Hong Kong and the local community’s attitudes towards them. While the average candidate may not know very much about banyans in particular, the controversy surrounding trees being cut down and traditions related to trees (e.g. the Lam Tsuen ‘Wishing Trees’) are likely to be familiar.

Level of difficulty: The two texts contain some words and phrases that are relatively technical, e.g. ‘masonry’ (Text 1, paragraph 3), ‘arboreal’ (Text 2, paragraph 2), ‘spindly aerial roots’ (Text 2, paragraph 3), ‘mortar’ (Text 2, paragraph 4), ‘canopy’ (Text 2, paragraph 5), ‘deforested’ (Text 2, paragraph 9), ‘gnarled’ (Text 2, paragraph 9) and ‘stumps’ (Text 2, paragraph 12). Candidates who take Geography in English may have an edge over others. Some descriptive vocabulary used in Text 2 to describe banyans may also pose difficulties, e.g. ‘behemoths’ (paragraph 2), ‘ubiquitous’ (paragraph 2), ‘imposing presence’ (paragraph 2), ‘defacing heritage’ (paragraph 6), ‘fecundity’ (paragraph 8) and ‘invincibility’ (paragraph 9).

Part B1

Part B1 comprises two feature articles (Text 3 and Text 4) on hawking in Hong Kong.

Number of passages: There are two passages in Part B1 this year, which is the same as last year. 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 two feature articles that appear in this year's Part B1 are both reasonably accessible. Text 3 is essentially three brief profiles of hawkers, focusing on how their 'business' has changed over the years. With such clear headings as 'Flour Doll Seller—Uncle Tang', 'Umbrella Mender—Uncle Ho' and 'Chestnut Roaster—Uncle Leung', candidates should find the text easy to follow. In fact, it is quite similar to Text 2 in 2023, a collection of three stories about guide dogs and their owners.

Topic: As the government has been clamping down on illegal hawking, some candidates may not have had much experience of buying from hawkers. However, numerous hints are included in Text 3 to help them make sense of the topic. These include two pictures (one showing flour dolls and the other roasted chestnuts) and a clear definition of 'hawking' given at the very beginning.

Level of difficulty: 2024 HKDSE candidates who attempted Part B1 should have found the passages manageable for the most part, especially Text 3. Text 4 does contain a number of advanced vocabulary items, e.g. 'cease to exist' (paragraph 1), 'depriving ... of' (paragraph 1), 'cultural significance' (paragraph 2), 'obstruction' (paragraph 3), 'commercial premises' (paragraph 3), 'rummaging through' (paragraph 4), 'the latest blow' (paragraph 5) and 'decongest' (paragraph 5), but the choice of words is in general on the accessible side.

Part B2

Part B2 comprises one text: the introductory section of a book entitled *Bad Science* by physician and science writer Ben Goldacre (Text 5).

Number of passages: So far, there have been nine papers with one Part B2 passage (2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024), two papers with two (2012 and 2018) and two papers with three (2016 and 2021).

Text type: This is an introductory essay printed at the beginning of a book, which functions as an opinion piece for the writer to 'set the scene' and outline what he is going to cover in his work. There is a distinct personal voice and a good deal of sarcasm. In this way, the text is stylistically similar to the Part B2 passages in 2019 (an author's recollection of his childhood mischief), 2020 (an agony uncle's reflections on his work) and 2023 (Michelle Obama's essays on girls' voices).

Topic: In the essay, the writer lays out the objectives of his book. He levels trenchant criticisms against unscientific, unethical and dangerous ways of doing science, and highlights how misleading media coverage has had an insidious impact on science as a whole. While a number of examples (homeopathy, 'faddish' diets, etc.) are given to illustrate some of the ideas, the essay is more theoretical than empirical, meaning that even stronger candidates may have significant trouble following the arguments.

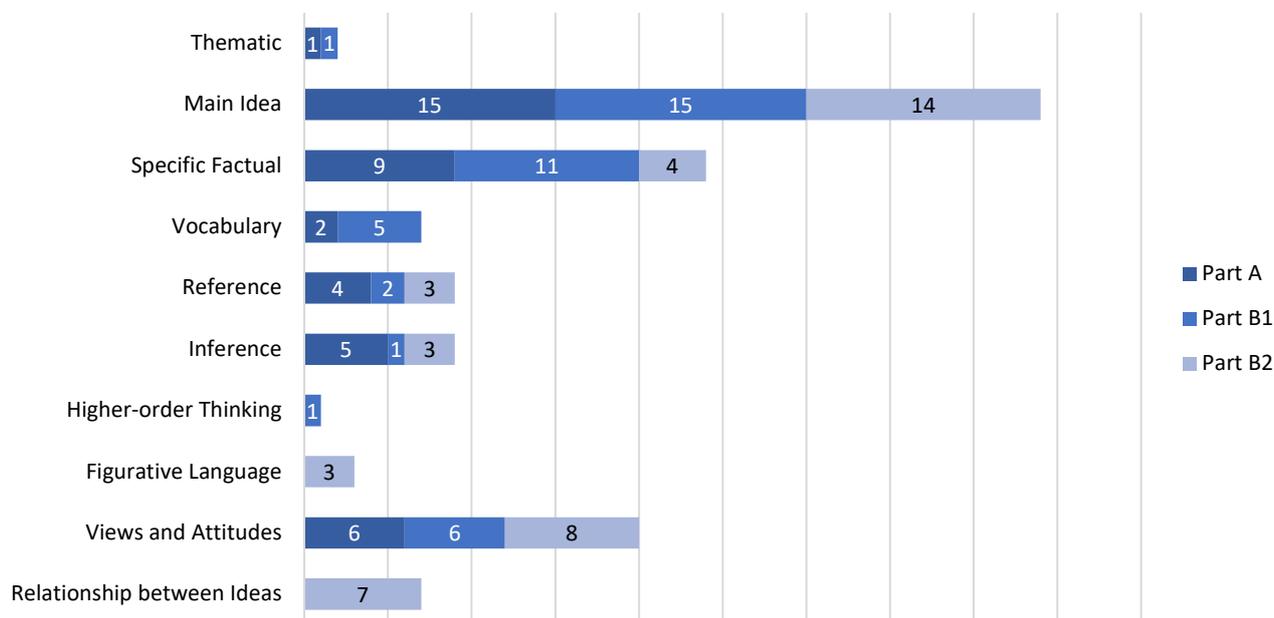
Level of difficulty: As expected, the Part B2 passage contains a considerable number of advanced vocabulary items, e.g. 'veracious' (paragraph 1), 'bodacious' (paragraph 1), 'trivial absurdities' (paragraph 4), 'credence' (paragraph 4), 'sciencey-sounding' (paragraph 7), 'bearing reliable witness to' (paragraph 7), 'patronising' (paragraph 9), 'credulously' (paragraph 9), 'homeopathy' (paragraph 10), 'pseudo-science' (paragraph 10), 'rhetorical slights of hand' (paragraph 12), 'a vanguard of startling wrongness' (paragraph 12), 'pull the wool over the eyes of ...' (paragraph 12), 'atomised experiences and prejudices' (paragraph 13), 'cynical distortion of evidence' (paragraph 13) and 'grotesque extremes' (paragraph 13). There are also academic terms which challenge the best candidates, including 'seminal book' (paragraph 1), 'medicalise social and political problems' (paragraph 12) and 'reductionist ... framework' (paragraph 12). It is possible for candidates to get by without knowing some of these words and phrases, though a few questions do presuppose knowledge of the advanced vocabulary.

Questions

Question Types

This year, the bulk of the questions are of the main idea or the specific factual kind. Candidates attempting Parts A and B1 do 50 marks' worth of those questions; as for those attempting Parts A and B2, the total number of marks is 42. Identifying views and attitudes is an increasingly important skill: it takes up 6, 6 and 8 marks in Parts A, B1 and B2 respectively. Exclusively in Part B2, candidates are tested on their understanding of the relationship between ideas (7 marks).

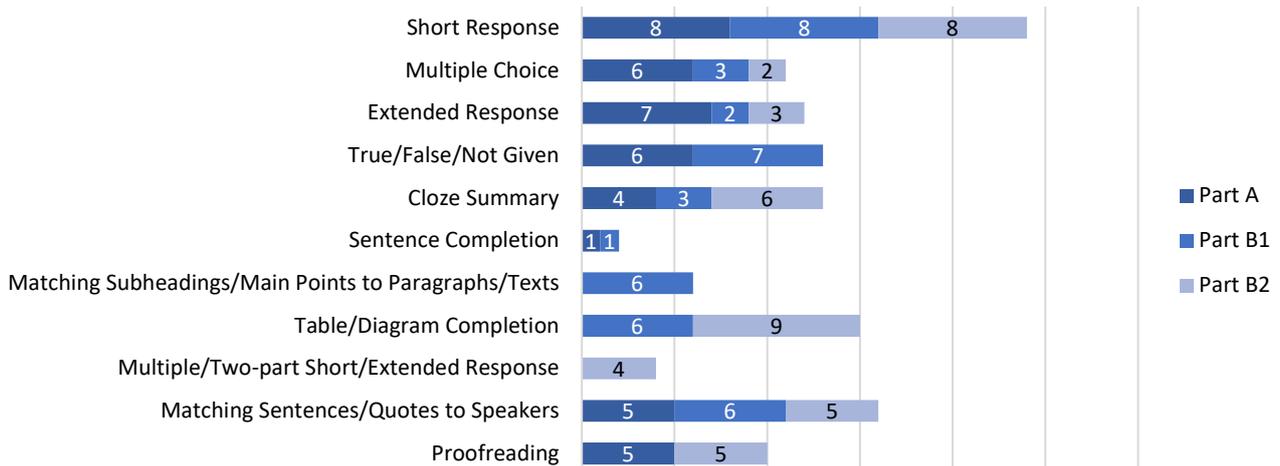
Question Type	Part A [42 marks]	Part B1 [42 marks]	Part B2 [42 marks]
Thematic	Q6	Q32	—
Main Idea	Q1 [2], Q7, Q11 [5], Q12 [4], Q13 [3]	Q36 [6], Q37 [3], Q41 [6]	Q43ii–iv [3], Q48 [6], Q55 [5]
Specific Factual	Q3, Q5 [3], Q18 [3], Q20, Q21	Q25, Q26, Q30, Q33, Q34 [4], Q38 [3]	Q43i, Q45ii, Q52, Q54
Vocabulary	Q10 [2]	Q24, Q28, Q35 [3]	—
Reference	Q4, Q8, Q14, Q16	Q27, Q39	Q45i, Q49, Q59
Inference	Q2, Q9, Q17, Q19, Q22	Q29	Q57, Q58, Q60
Higher-order Thinking	—	Q42	—
Figurative Language	—	—	Q47, Q50, Q53
Views and Attitudes	Q15, Q23 [5]	Q31 [3], Q40 [3]	Q44, Q56, Q61 [5], Q62
Relationship between Ideas	—	—	Q46 [2], Q51 [5]



Question Formats

As expected, 2024 Paper 1 is comprised mainly of short response and multiple-choice questions. More extended response questions (7 marks) are set in Part A than usual. There are also a good number of ‘matching sentences/quotes to speakers’ and proofreading items. A candidate opting for Parts A and B2, for instance, would come across four such questions amounting to 20 marks.

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



Noteworthy Questions and Recommendations

Part A

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
9, 22	These are inference questions. For Question 9, candidates need to make an informed guess as to why banyans would take over Hong Kong in a few hundred years if the city were abandoned, by paying attention to the hints given in paragraph 2, such as the fact that banyans are 'ubiquitous' and can grow 'even between the cracks of stone walls' (lines 4–5). Question 22 is about the quality of banyan trees that makes them deserving of worship, which can be inferred from paragraph 12: 'You can count on banyans to find a way to survive even in the most difficult conditions' (lines 50–51). Coincidentally, the two questions call for very similar answers.	–
11	This is a main idea question set in the proofreading format. It is more challenging than similar questions in past HKDSE papers, mainly because some items do not merely require an antonym, e.g. (i): change 'branches' to 'roots' (some may be tempted to change 'thin' to 'spindly', without knowing that the two adjectives are similar in meaning); and (iii) change 'recorded' to 'counted'.	Candidates should always read the text and the short paragraph set for a proofreading question carefully.
12	This is a main idea question set in the cloze summary format. The answer to (iv)—'grow'—can be found in line 15, before the answer to (i) ('traditional'). Candidates may instead opt for one of the distractors near the end of the paragraph: 'grows' (wrong grammar) or 'plunge' (meaning incomplete).	While most of the answers to cloze summary questions can be found in the same order as the word or concept appears in the text, this is not always the case.
13	This is a main idea question set in the multiple-choice format. Weaker candidates may have trouble scoring marks here due to an inability to comprehend advanced vocabulary. The answer to (i) is 'B. umbrella', presupposing knowledge of the word 'canopy'. For (ii), candidates need to understand the concept of a 'pedestrianising' street to arrive at the correct answer 'A. traffic-free'.	–

Part B1

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
31, 40	These are views and attitudes questions requiring candidates to match descriptions or comments to people mentioned in the texts. Candidates need a good understanding of each individual's opinion in order to score these marks.	At the beginning of the examination, candidates can skim through the question-answer books to see how many such questions there are. Then, they can highlight or underline the names of individuals or organizations in the passage(s) so that they can easily go back to the relevant paragraphs later.

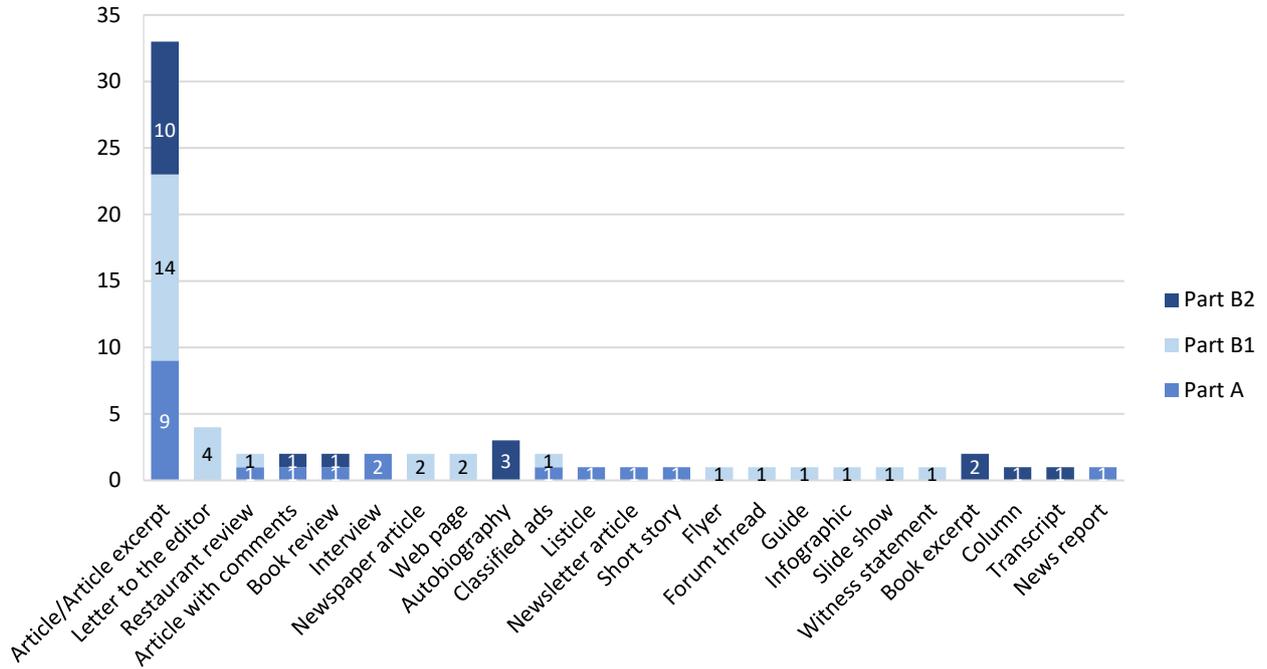
Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
42	This is a higher-order thinking question about whether hawking should be preserved in Hong Kong. Candidates can choose to agree or disagree so long as they provide a reason taken from the text, e.g. 'obstruction', 'environmental nuisance', 'hygiene and fire risks' (lines 17–18) or 'Without hawkers, society would be quiet and empty' (line 37).	Candidates should remember that Paper 1 is a reading comprehension test. Unless otherwise stated, they should base their answers on what is in the text and avoid only giving their personal opinion.

Part B2

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
44	This is a views and attitudes question. To identify Goldacre's attitude, candidates can study the first and last sentences of the paragraph, which read: 'Let me tell you how <i>bad</i> things have become' (line 6) and 'We will devote some time to [...] the <i>fools</i> in our education system who endorse [these beliefs]' (lines 10–11). It should then become obvious that the word 'sciencey' (line 8), in quotation marks, suggests that the author finds Brain Gym unscientific, even absurd.	Candidates should practise reading between the lines so as to better identify attitudes and opinions that are indirectly expressed.
49, 59	These are reference questions requiring candidates to identify the referent of 'the territory' (Question 49) and 'along the way' (Question 59). They are not easy as they pertain to the extended metaphor where one's reading experience is likened to a journey: 'mapping out the territory' refers to the writer laying out the contents of his book, whereas 'along the way' refers to the reader going through the book.	—
51	This is a relationship between ideas question almost identical to Question 53 from 2023. Candidates are given some general descriptions and asked to supply an example for each from the text. They should pay attention to the wordings used in the table and write concisely as redundant information may lead to a loss of marks. For example, in answering part (iv) (an example of pseudo-science), just the example 'homeopathy' would do; copying entire sentences from the text, e.g. 'homeopathy is the perfect model for teaching evidence-based medicine...' could prove counter-productive.	Precision and conciseness matter greatly in answering reading comprehension questions. Candidates tend to 'copy more' when in doubt, but they should be reminded that any redundant or contradictory information would be marked down.
55	This is a main idea question set in the proofreading format. Similar to Question 11, some items do not involve underlining the wrong word and writing its antonym, e.g. (ii): change 'prevalent' to 'worrying'; (iii): change 'pointless' to 'basic'.	See Question 11
62	This is a views and attitudes question on whether Goldacre is optimistic or pessimistic about the future of science and medicine. To answer this question, candidates should demonstrate a global understanding of the text's theme, that is to say, unscientific and unethical practices pervade society, including education (paragraphs 3 and 6), the media (paragraphs 7 and 9), the food and nutrition industry (paragraph 12) and so on. These pieces of evidence should assist candidates in arriving at the conclusion that the outlook as depicted by the author is rather bleak.	See Question 42

HKDSE Paper 1 Statistics (2012–2024)

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	1
2016	2	5	3
2017	1	3	1
2018	2	2	2
2019	1	3	1
2020	1	2	1
2021	3	2	3
2022	1	2	1
2023	1	2	1
2024	2	2	1
Average	1.5	2.3	1.5

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)
2022	1,175	1,035 (188+847)	1,177
2023	1,043	1,029 (388+641)	1,155
2024	1,183 (247+936)	966 (329+637)	1,141
Average	1,055	945	1,141

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
2022	23	42	19	42	23	42
2023	22	42	23	42	24	42
2024	23	42	19	42	20	42
Average	23	42	22	42	23	42

Question Types

Parts A+B1

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Thematic	2	1	1	2	0	0	3	2	2	0	2	0	2
Main Idea	6	3	1	12	7	2	4	6	7	18	28	28	30
Specific Factual	13	21	28	10	17	25	15	11	36	26	16	20	20
Vocabulary	4	2	4	4	3	8	6	4	4	7	7	9	7
Reference	3	3	6	5	4	2	6	6	5	5	9	5	6
Inference	10	12	16	12	7	2	8	6	8	11	7	5	6
Higher-order Thinking	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	1
Figurative Language	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	4	4	1	2	1	0
Views and Attitudes	1	0	0	4	5	1	0	1	9	10	11	10	12
Sequencing	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	4	0	0	4	0
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	5	4	1	2	0

Parts A+B2

Question Type	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Thematic	1	1	0	3	0	1	2	1	0	4	0	0	1
Main Idea	9	6	3	13	8	2	4	4	11	8	29	27	29
Specific Factual	10	14	20	3	13	21	8	9	21	16	7	16	13
Vocabulary	8	2	1	5	5	2	8	6	2	8	8	6	2
Reference	4	3	9	5	2	1	4	7	5	5	7	3	7
Inference	14	12	18	13	12	9	14	10	12	19	3	14	8
Higher-order Thinking	3	2	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	2	1	1	0
Figurative Language	1	2	3	3	3	2	7	3	6	1	3	2	3
Views and Attitudes	2	0	0	5	3	1	0	2	13	1	11	10	14
Sequencing	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	1	0
Language Usage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship between Ideas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9	20	14	4	7

 **Question Formats**

Parts A+B1

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Short Response	10	13	26	30	13	12	14	11	9	14	15	19	16
Multiple Choice	11	9	11	7	13	13	11	10	11	17	10	6	9
Extended Response	1	4	5	2	6	7	7	1	3	4	6	3	9
True/False/Not Given	2	4	4	2	2	2	2	3	10	10	3	10	13
Cloze Summary	2	3	0	1	4	3	4	3	10	17	3	11	7
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	1	3	1	0	1	2	3	3	7	9	12	1	0
Sentence Completion	3	1	2	0	0	0	2	4	4	1	4	3	2
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	8	6
Labelling Pictures	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	11	8	17	9	6
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	1	2	4	4	2	0
Sequencing	2	1	2	1	0	3	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	9	0	5	6	11
Proofreading	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	0	1	5	5
Timeline Completion	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Parts A+B2

Question Format	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Short Response	17	11	26	24	17	6	17	13	9	16	13	12	16
Multiple Choice	15	11	11	6	13	9	11	9	11	15	10	7	8
Extended Response	9	7	4	5	7	7	9	6	7	4	7	11	10
True/False/Not Given	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	8	12	3	7	6
Cloze Summary	2	4	1	2	1	1	5	2	5	8	6	13	10
Ticking Boxes/Blackening Circles/Matching	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	12	0	1	0	0
Sentence Completion	1	0	2	0	2	2	1	2	1	0	10	2	1
Matching Subheadings/Main Points to Paragraphs/Texts	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	4	3	0	5	0
Labelling Pictures	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Table/Diagram Completion	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	10	20	18	8	9
Multiple/Two-part Short/Extended Response	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	3	4	6	5	10	4
Sequencing	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Matching Sentences/Quotes to Speakers	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	5	0	6	3	10
Proofreading	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	0	1	5	10
Timeline Completion	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

2024 HKDSE · Paper 2 (Writing)

Part A

Question 1

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
1	Email of complaint	A customer	Hotel manager	Formal

This year, candidates are required to assume the role of a guest at the Seaside Hotel and write an email of complaint to the hotel manager following a stay that fell far short of expectations. To assist candidates in generating ideas for the email, a screenshot from the hotel’s website is given, providing a lot of information about the room. This includes: a picture of a spacious and well-lit guest room (in which one can see a double bed, a flat-screen television and well-appointed furniture), room type (‘room with balcony and ocean view’), amenities and other specifications (Wi-Fi, air conditioning, room service and non-smoking). Candidates are also informed of a discounted rate (HK\$1,580 per night instead of HK\$1,780) that is all-inclusive, i.e. no further taxes and fees are to be incurred. Based on the facts above, candidates should write in the email about why they were disappointed and what they would like the manager to do.

In terms of content, this question is quite straightforward. This is especially true of the first prompt (‘why you were disappointed’), as candidates can generate relevant ideas just by referring to the screenshot. In fact, they are not expected to deviate much from the given information as the question states clearly that their disappointment stems from the room being ‘very different from what was shown on the hotel’s website’. However, to score high, candidates should focus on two or three areas of concern and elaborate on each, preferably by offering concrete details and describing precisely how they felt about the problem. For instance, they could mention their frustrations as they tried to connect to Wi-Fi in their room and/or what they were unable to do on their devices due to the slow connection. Candidates should understand that it is not advisable to attempt to cover all the points as they would have no time to develop their ideas.

Some candidates who are familiar with the ‘problem-solution’ question type may be tempted to address the second prompt (‘what you would like the manager to do’) by offering general suggestions to improve the standard of service, without much regard for their complaint itself. Although this is not entirely irrelevant, this does show a lack of awareness as far as the context and the purpose of writing are concerned: after all, an email of complaint is normally written to demand something, e.g. a refund, a discount, or an apology.

While candidates should express dissatisfaction in their writing, as is required by the question, they should not adopt an overly aggressive style, e.g. by asking an excessive number of questions (e.g. ‘Don’t you think fast Wi-Fi is essential to a hotel room nowadays?’) or employing emotive adjectives (e.g. ‘The room service food was horrendous and disgusting’). Such a tone may prove counter-productive. Instead, they should state the problems in a calm and civilized manner and urge the hotel management to take their comments seriously.

Part A General Observations and Recommendations

Part A is a guided short writing task. Apart from the words that make up the question proper, candidates are almost always provided with additional prompts that mandate or suggest ideas to be included. The screenshot from a hotel website this year, the headings of an application form in 2023, the map of an adventure farm in 2022 and the poster on an annual school fair in 2021 are but a few examples. Regardless of their ability, candidates should first ensure that they have ‘ticked the boxes’ and there are no big ‘gaps’ in their content, before going beyond the prompt to demonstrate their creativity. As is the case with all compositions, candidates should adjust their choice of language based on the text type they are required to produce.

Part B

Question	Text Type	Role	Target Audience	Register
2	Essay	Not specified	Not specified	Formal
3	Blog entry	Musician and blogger	Musicians	Informal
4	Letter to the editor	Reader of the <i>Hong Kong Times</i>	Editors and readers of the <i>Hong Kong Times</i>	Formal / Semi-formal
5	Article	Student	Readers of the school magazine	Semi-formal / Informal

Question 2

Question 2 is an essay on family size. Candidates are told that the average number of children Hong Kong women have has dropped from five a century ago to less than one. The task is an expository essay on the reasons why having fewer children is more desirable now than in the past.

In general, candidates are expected to give two to three reasons to explain the phenomenon. These may include: a ‘child-first’ culture in which parents hope to be able to spend enough time with each child and attend to his/her needs; a desire for personal freedom which to some extent goes against the notion of a big family; a lack of confidence in the future, in terms of socio-economic issues, environmental issues and the education system; and the gradual abandonment of the idea that raising children can provide for old age. Candidates who read the news and are well-informed of this particular issue should be able to produce relevant essays. As this is a formal essay, candidates should adopt an objective style and avoid citing personal anecdotes.

Question 3

Question 3 is a blog entry whose context is somewhat similar to that of a letter of advice. Candidates are given the role of a successful musician who maintains a music blog. The task is to write an entry on how musicians can reach a wider audience, in response to an enquiry from a reader who is an aspiring musician.

Since this is an informal piece of writing for a blog, candidates have some freedom to decide on the structure of the text as long as the body paragraphs address the focus of the question, i.e. how to get more people to listen to one’s songs. They may take a ‘methodical’ approach and explain step-by-step how musicians may achieve success; alternatively, an ‘anecdotal’ approach where readers are encouraged to learn from the writer’s past experience is also appropriate. While candidates may refer to the situation of the reader mentioned in the prompt, they should understand that this is a blog entry for (aspiring) musicians in general, not a letter of advice to a particular individual.

Question 4

Question 4 requires candidates to write a letter to the editor of the *Hong Kong Times* to express their opinion on Hong Kong’s efforts to be dog-friendly. They are introduced to opposing views on the matter: while many shops, parks and restaurants have started welcoming dogs, some people have reservations about this trend. In their letters, candidates are expected to take a clear stance and provide reasons.

Candidates should be reasonably familiar with letters to the editor, which are often written in response to an article or another letter in a publication. Such a purpose of writing should be indicated in the introductory paragraph. As the question does not specify who the writer actually is (apart from the fact that he/she is a reader of the *Hong Kong Times*), candidates may take on a role that enables them to put forward relevant arguments, e.g. a dog owner, the operator of a dog-friendly establishment, or somebody who is allergic to dog hair. Well-written letters are likely to include plenty of examples, either those of general relevance or personal stories that pertain to the role assumed by the candidate.

Question 5

For question 5, candidates have to write a school magazine article about a special experience on social media: a video of theirs went viral and gained 100,000 likes overnight.

This task is similar to a column where the author's personal voice takes centre stage; it is rather different from the relatively objective feature articles that many candidates in 2023 opted to write (tai-chi, anime convention, retirement age, running a restaurant during the pandemic). As such, apart from providing factual details, e.g. what the video is about and what netizens said about it, candidates should also describe their emotions and feelings from time to time. Stronger candidates may, on top of chronicling the events, highlight what they have learnt from this unusual experience, e.g. that fame is short-lived, especially on social media; that one reaps what one sows; or that it is important to stay humble even if one achieves great success.

Part B General Observations and Recommendations

- **Pictorial prompts:** In recent years, pictures have featured heavily in Part B of the writing paper. Many are tokenistic, but a few do provide candidates with a starting point. In 2024, Question 4 on Hong Kong's 'dog-friendly' policies contains a poster reminding owners to keep their dog on a leash and under control at all times. These ideas could be addressed by candidates in their letters.
- **A 'general' orientation:** The 2024 examination marks the first time in HKDSE history where only four questions, 'de-linked' from the elective modules, are offered. In line with the sample paper, this year's questions appear to provide students with a greater degree of flexibility in terms of interpretation. For example, candidates who attempt Question 3 ('Write a blogpost on how musicians can get more people to listen to their music') or Question 5 ('Write an article for the school magazine about your experience') are free to structure their text as they see fit, as long as the given context is addressed. This could pose difficulties to weaker students who work better with clear guidelines ('do this, then do that').

2024 HKDSE · Paper 3 (Listening and Integrated Skills)

Part A

Part A of Paper 3 in 2024 consists of four short listening tasks on the topic of human migration. Unlike most past HKDSE papers (but similar to 2020), the tasks, albeit thematically linked, are contextually distinct from each other. In other words, candidates are not given one single role for this part of the paper. Another notable feature of this year's paper is that two tasks (Task 2 and Task 4) are based on a monologue, which is not as easy to follow as a dialogue, especially by weaker candidates.

Task	Context	Question Formats	Task Type	Marks
1	A conversation between two students about a museum exhibition	Gap-filling, MCQ, table, ticking boxes	Note sheet	12
2	A lecture on a famous expedition by an expert in human migration	Gap-filling, MCQ, ticking boxes	Note sheet	14
3	A podcast interview on people's language learning experiences	Gap-filling, table	Note sheet	14
4	A radio programme about <i>Chunyun</i>	Q&A, table	Note sheet	13

Task 1

In Task 1, candidates listen to a conversation between two students who are visiting a museum exhibition entitled 'The Great Human Migration'. Question formats include gap-filling, multiple-choice, table completion and ticking boxes. While the task includes a good amount of repetition to assist candidates, the speed at which content is delivered is noticeably faster than that in the previous years.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
1–4	These four pieces of basic information were given in quick succession, without the sort of immediate repetition that is commonly found in Task 1, especially at the beginning. Although there is a quick recap afterwards, weaker students may have trouble following the flow of ideas.	Candidates should pay full attention to the recording from the very first second. They should not assume that the first answers would be straightforward.
6	The answer is 'seventy thousand years ago'. Weaker candidates who are unfamiliar with English numbers may struggle between 70,000 and 700,000.	Candidates should practise listening for numbers, especially larger figures.
12	'Ticking boxes' questions are usually easy, but this time all the information is given in one single sentence without any repetition. To add to the difficulty, the words that appear on the recording (e.g. 'learning how to farm for food') are slightly different from those used in the question (e.g. 'grow food').	In preparing for 'ticking boxes' questions, candidates should study all the options beforehand. They should listen for meaning, not just the keywords, when they decide which options to choose.

Task 2

In Task 2, candidates listen to a lecture by an expert in human migration on the ‘Paqua Monna’ Expedition. Question formats include gap-filling, multiple-choice and ticking boxes. This task is relatively straightforward for each answer requires not more than three words.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
19–20	The numbering for Questions 19 and 20 adds to the difficulty here as students need to understand the words ‘long’ and ‘wide’ so as not to just write down the answers in the order they are given.	—
26	The answer is that modern Polynesians share similar genes (option D) to South Americans. However, all three distractors (culture, religion and language) are mentioned too.	Again, candidates ought to listen for meaning, not just the keywords. This is especially true of multiple-choice questions, where the speaker may use words relating to some or all of the distractors with the intent to confuse.

Task 3

In Task 3, candidates hear a podcast in which three people are interviewed about their language learning experiences. Most questions are of the table completion type, with some requiring slightly longer answers. There are also a few gap-filling questions.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
28–33	These table completion questions are relatively challenging as the answers do not always come in order.	Candidates should study all tables carefully during preparation time and make use of the margins to take notes whenever necessary.
29–31	These concern the reason why each interviewee is learning a language. However, when the speakers share about their family origins, they say, ‘... so (that’s why) I’m learning Spanish/Mandarin/French’. Candidates may be tempted to make notes on hearing this, but the content would be more or less the same as the information above (‘Language they are learning’, ‘Family originated from’). Eventually, the host invites the interviewees to further explain their choice (‘Apart from the strong cultural connection you have, what are some of the other reasons you have for learning your heritage language?’), and this is where candidates can obtain their answers to Questions 29–31. Such back-and-forth could be very confusing.	—

Task 4

In Task 4, candidates listen to a radio programme about *Chunyun*, i.e. the Chinese phenomenon where millions of people travel back home during Spring Festival. As has been the norm since 2015, Task 4 contains numerous items in the question-and-answer format. There are also some table completion questions. Candidates are expected to have significant difficulty completing this task as there is little repetition and the information is delivered at near-natural speed.

Question(s)	Analysis	Recommendation(s)
42	The answer is 'four hundred million' or 400,000,000. Weaker candidates may have trouble making sense of such a large number.	See Question 6
43, 44	Candidates are asked to explain why more people are travelling now than in the past. To get these questions right, they have to pay attention to signposting expressions, such as 'In the past ...', 'However, economic reforms in the 1980s meant ...' and 'In addition, in recent decades ...', then decide what to note down.	Candidates should learn to differentiate between main and supporting points by listening for signposting expressions.
53	The phrase 'part and parcel' may be foreign to candidates.	—

Part B

Part B of Paper 3 in 2024 presents candidates with a workplace situation. Candidates assume the role of Nico Lin, who works for World City Travel, a company that specializes in local and overseas wildlife tours. 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 an email template for participants of a tour	Email	—	17
6	Writing an email to the manager of the Botanical Gardens about a tour	Email	150	18
7	Writing a blog post to promote a new exhibition	Blog post	120	18
8	Writing an incident report for an accident	Report	140	17
9	Writing a follow-up email to participants of a cancelled cruise	Email	180	18
10	Writing a script for a YouTube advertisement for a new fishing tour	Script	180	18

Listening Note-taking Sheet

Candidates listen to a recorded Zoom meeting attended by Mr Shane Lee (CEO of World City Travel), Ms Avery Goh (Manager of World City Travel) and biologist Dr David Atkinson. This year, there are five note-headings, compared to four in 2023. Under one of the note-headings, there are two bulleted sub-headings to further assist candidates. Each note-heading is relevant to either Part B1 or Part B2, unlike in the 2023 paper, where information for both parts was included under one of the note-headings. A new development is that all six tasks this year require candidates to use their notes.

Part B1 Data File

The Part B1 Data File contains nine items, one fewer than its Part B2 counterpart. If the word count is an accurate guide, this year's reading load (1,673 words) is heavier than any of the HKDSE past papers. Having said this, a number of sources do not contain a lot of text, including a webpage (page 5) and an advertisement (page 6). These should be easy to understand even for the less able candidates. This year's instructional email is also relatively candidate-friendly as the 'boss' specifies all the sources that are useful in completing each task (e.g. 'You should be able to find all the information in the Hong Kong Wetland Park visitor guide, my WhatsApp chat with Shane Lee, and the screenshot of the Skype chat between David Atkinson and Shane Lee'). There appears to be an increased emphasis on chat exchanges, e.g. SMS messages, WhatsApp chat and Skype chat.

Part B1 Task 5

With the exception of 2020 and 2022, Task 5 is a guided task that requires no extended writing. This can serve as an easier task to ease candidates into this part of the examination.

This year, candidates have to complete an email which provides participants with information about the Guided Nature Walk at the Hong Kong Wetland Park. Since the content points are clearly identified by the email template and candidates only have to write a few words 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 answers come from the listening note-taking sheet. The only thing that may be challenging is the need to change 'pregnant women' and 'people with serious health problems' into the singular in the answer.

Part B1 Task 6

Task 6 is a formal email to Peter Chan, the manager of the Hong Kong Botanical Gardens. The purpose is to inform Mr Chan of a change to the Bird Watching Tour and ask him some questions. The content points from the recording (concerning the change of time and the reason) are straightforward, but some candidates may have trouble identifying the two questions and the reasons. This is because of the relative complexity of the sources, especially Karen Ken's email (page 11), where she shares her entire experience before making it clear what she is asking for.

Candidates should adopt a polite and businesslike tone in their email. They should avoid including internal remarks (e.g. 'I don't want any more negative reviews!' on page 10) or irrelevant information (e.g. 'the staff there were really very sweet' on page 11) which may be at odds with the communicative purpose. They should also include a concise, functional subject line (e.g. 'Bird Watching Tour for World City Travel') and use an appropriate salutation ('Dear Mr Chan') and valediction ('Yours sincerely, Nico Lin').

Part B1 Task 7

For Task 7, candidates are required to write a blog post on a new exhibition on insects and reptiles. The task is relatively difficult by Part B1 standards since the instructional email does not spell out very clearly what content is expected. Instead, candidates have to read Avery Goh's SMS messages with David Atkinson (page 7) for more specific instructions. While the names of the dragonflies that will feature at the exhibition ('Red Baller' and 'Blue Tail') may be unfamiliar, they are mentioned both on the recording and in the Data File (page 5). This should assist weaker candidates to some extent.

The greatest challenge posed by this task is the lack of direction in the Data File as to how the content points should ideally be ordered. Part B1 candidates are likely to resort to writing down whatever they can get hold of, without regard for effective presentation. To get two marks in 'Coherence and Organization', they should, for example, mention the event's highlights at the beginning and the special offers at the end.

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. As is the case with Part B1, this year's Data File is the longest ever in HKDSE history at 2,414 words. Three of the sources, namely a news article (page 6), SMS messages (page 7) and the minutes of a meeting (page 10), contain information that pertains to all three tasks. Candidates are likely to spend more time than usual on comprehending these texts and extracting content points.

Part B2 Task 8

Task 8 is an internal incident report on an accident involving one of World City Travel's catamarans, during the Sydney Whale Watching Cruise. Based on instructions printed in an excerpt of the company handbook (page 11), candidates locate information about the accident, identify possible causes and draw conclusions as to who may or may not be responsible. In a helpful gesture, the handbook points candidates to specific sources for each part of the report (e.g. 'Such information is usually available after initial investigations and interviews').

Nonetheless, candidates may struggle to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant content while reading through the radio communication transcript (page 5). While the date, time and location are important, much of the back-and-forth between Captain Moby and the control centre, if included in the task, would lead to redundancy and probably a mark deduction in the 'Appropriacy' domain. Candidates should familiarize themselves with the concise, factual style of a formal report and write accordingly.

Part B2 Task 9

In Task 9, subsequent to the cancellation of a Sydney Whale Watching Cruise (due to the incident in Task 8), candidates are expected to write an email to lay out a compensation package to the affected customers. To secure all 'Task Completion' marks, they need to consult a total of six Data File sources plus the listening note-taking sheet; a good amount of synthesis is required. For example, to know that the participants will be given a free 'Aqua Vita' photo print by Dr David Atkinson (page 11), candidates must first note down the fact that lifetime membership is being offered (from the recording). While the instructional email suggests that candidates go to the email from Shane Lee (page 8) for a start, it might have caused some difficulty for candidates as it includes a lot of comments that they are clearly not supposed to include in their email. They should also read the minutes (page 10) carefully as the document contains detailed instructions about the complimentary cruise, e.g. 'participants should be referred to the company website for the itineraries'.

As candidates are simply told to 'tell [the participants] exactly how much we value our customers, then let them know about the compensation package', they not only have to paraphrase but actually come up with their own wordings for the answer to be appropriate. Some may be at a loss as to how best to sequence their content points. In terms of 'Appropriacy', although it may be necessary to make an apology (for the cancellation) at the beginning, the overall tone should be positive so as to reassure and retain customers.

Part B2 Task 10

Task 10 is a script to promote the new Adventure Fishing Tour. As is the case with Task 9, candidates are expected to consult six Data File sources plus the listening note-taking sheet, synthesising information as they go. This is quite a complicated task, with a lot of changes or corrections made across a record-breaking number of Data File items. For example, according to the article (page 6), the tour was to run from 15 November to 27 January, but this is superseded by an update in the minutes (page 10): the tour will in fact start on 6 December. The free buffet lunch was to be provided by *Chez Poisson* (email on page 8), but they have since been replaced by *iSea Caterers* (minutes on page 10). Candidates should always be on the lookout for revisions and updates while going through the Data File.

Again, the instructional email does not exactly spell out how the content points should be ordered; the supervisor (Avery Goh) simply says 'our CEO will be happy if you explain how this will enhance the customer experience'. Candidates need more time to plan out their text so as to obtain 'Coherence and Organization' marks. As for 'Appropriacy', they should write in an engaging, conversational tone so as to suit the text type. Irrelevant information, such as live music by Bubblegum, should be avoided. The idea was raised in an email (page 8) but rejected by Dr David Atkinson (minutes on page 10).

HKDSE Paper 3 Statistics (2012–2024)

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
2022	13	12	14	13	52	18	18	17	53	18	17	18	53
2023	13	13	14	13	53	16	18	19	53	19	17	17	53
2024	12	14	14	13	53	17	18	18	53	17	18	18	53
Average	13.9	13.6	14.2	13.0	54.7	16.7	18.2	18.0	52.8	18.5	17.5	17.4	53.3

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
2022	9	9	9	9	14	14	9	9	8	8	9	9
2023	14	14	9	9	10	10	10	10	8	8	8	8
2024	15	15	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	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
2022	100	120	—	220	150	170	180	500
2023	—	120	120	240	200	150	120	470
2024	—	150	120	270	140	180	180	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
2021	9	1,342	9	2,078
2022	8	1,228	11	1,902
2023	10	1,499	8	2,377
2024	9	1,673	11	2,414
Average	9.0	1,344	9.8	2,026