



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SINGAPORE
in collaboration with
CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
General Certificate of Education Normal (Academic) Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE (SYLLABUS A)

1190/03

Paper 3 Listening
SPECIMEN TEXTS

For examination from 2023

Approximately 45 minutes

This document consists of **6** printed pages.



Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board



Cambridge Assessment
International Education

Text for Questions 1 and 2

(two friends, teenagers)

- M** This newspaper has fifteen pages about football and football players! The press is obsessed.
- F** There's always lots of football news. It's because football's popular – that's hardly the players' fault.
- M** On the TV earlier, I saw a player answering questions about a match he'd played in. He had nothing interesting to say – they never do.
- F** Well, there's a limit to what you can say about football. What does get on my nerves is when someone gets fairly tackled and then rolls around on the ground screaming – attempting to get their opponent sent off.
- M** They're more like actors than athletes, which doesn't make them the best role models. They're always protesting to the referee too – yelling at them.
- F** There's certainly lots of that. It's part of the game, though – I'd miss it if it wasn't there.
- M** Maybe. What about the money they earn? Just for kicking a ball around.
- F** I know elite players are millionaires, but only a tiny percentage make it to the top. And those that do are extremely dedicated – they're always training. They also have to perform in front of massive crowds – that can't be easy. And one thing that is often not considered is they only have ten, maybe fifteen, years as professionals – they need money for when they retire. It's more complicated than it might seem.

Text for Questions 3 and 4

(male adult, young female)

- M** Could you tell me about your favourite guitar?
- F** It's the acoustic one I use for concerts. It's eighty years old and worth a fortune. I wouldn't be able to afford it now, but I bought it ten years ago from another guitarist who needed some cash at short notice. It hadn't been very well-looked after and needed repairs, which weren't cheap. I loved its sound, but, for about five years, it felt awkward in my hands, and I wondered whether I'd ever really form a bond with it. Musicians often have to make a connection with their instruments.
- M** But you play it a lot now?
- F** Yes, and I'm very protective of it. When I travel to concerts by plane or train, I always book the seat next to mine for it. With the kind of jazz music I play, you need to know that when you have a musical idea, your hands and fingers will do exactly what you want instantly, and that's only possible with the right instrument. If I had to play another guitar, even a similar model, I'd be a bit slower and clumsier, though the average concert-goer is unlikely to hear that and probably wouldn't see anything really different about me.

Text for Questions 5 and 6

(mother and son)

- F** Everyone from my office has started to work from home.
- M** How do you feel about that?
- F** Well, I don't miss the commuting. Not seeing colleagues every day is strange – we can meet up at weekends, though.
- M** Didn't granddad use to work from home?
- F** Yes. I remember him complaining about finding it hard to stay at his desk and avoid doing other things, like housework or having a snack – and he put on weight. I'm more disciplined about things like that. The danger as I see it is that with more flexible hours, I might end up working in the evenings.
- M** Lots of people work from home nowadays. Why hasn't your company introduced it before?
- F** Until now they always had everything going on at one site, where managers could keep an eye on what everyone was up to. They had to rethink that when everyone started working remotely – that's what it was in our case. Organisations vary, though. You need certain equipment and systems in order to work from home, and that requires investment. Businesses often worry about who might gain access to sensitive information if everything's happening on some kind of network. Also, there's often a fear that team spirit will be lost and there'll be less collaboration.

Texts for Questions 7 to 12

Speaker 1 (F – 15 years old)

In 'Where'd you go, Betty', a teenager called May who is the narrator lives with her dad, Ted, who's an IT expert. May's mum, Betty, is a former top architect. One day, Betty disappears, and Ted and May look for her. The story's full of unexpected twists and turns, and that's what kept me interested really. Being fifteen like May, I could sympathise with her feelings but Betty's character was also interesting. At first, she just seems weird, but gradually you come to understand her.

Speaker 2 (M – 15 years old)

'Monday' is about twenty-four hours in the life of a brain surgeon, and there are long, detailed descriptions of operations he does. It includes masses of stuff I wasn't aware of before – that was the standout feature of the book for me. It's also a thriller – there's an unexpected, shocking event in the surgeon's personal life. The writing's so clear and precise, and you really get inside the surgeon's head – his thoughts, his feelings, and how he relates to his family, friends and colleagues.

Speaker 3 (F – 15 years old)

In 'Don't Leave Me', a woman remembers being at a special boarding school in the nineteen-seventies. There are many interesting references to that decade. There's also plenty about what the teenage students did and said, some of which I found quite familiar. So, it's a shock when you realise they're all clones – genetically identical copies who were created as part of a scientific experiment. You're shown life from a clone's perspective. It's similar to a normal person's perspective, but nothing like it at the same time. That's what made the book special for me.

Speaker 4 (M – 15 years old)

'Weather Report' has six separate, but somehow connected, stories, set in different places and times – from a remote Pacific Island in the nineteenth century to weird societies in the future. We meet a wide range of fictional people whose lives are nothing like mine, but strangely I often thought: 'I know exactly how you feel.' That's what appealed to me more than anything. Each story has a different narrator with their own way of telling it, but the writing's so good they're all completely convincing.

Speaker 5 (F – 15 years old)

I wasn't very well when I read 'One Hundred Days', but the story took my mind off all my problems – that's why I enjoyed it so much. It's set in Mexico in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it's about various generations of a family. Many strange things happen – the novel presents a different way of looking at the world – but the author tells the story so well you believe it's all true. It's also one of those books where you're desperate to see what happens next.

Speaker 6 (M – 15 years old)

'The Village' tells the story of Eileen, a young woman, who moves to California, and then returns to her hometown. She's a shop assistant in both places. That doesn't sound very exciting, but you get lots of details about ordinary people's lives in the 1950s, which is why I'm glad I read it – I knew nothing about that time. The writer uses pretty straightforward language, but it's also very powerful – you get right inside the heads of Eileen and the people she's close to.

Texts for Questions 13 to 22

(adult female)

Last year I took part in the Marathon des Sables in the Sahara Desert. The race lasts seven days, including a rest day. A normal marathon is forty-two kilometres, but this one covers two hundred and fifty kilometres. It's run in six stages: the shortest being twenty-one kilometres – half a standard marathon – and the longest eighty-two kilometres. And the desert conditions are very tough. Lots of the Sahara consists of rocky surfaces and I found those tougher than anything else I had to deal with, but sand dunes are exhausting to run across too – and the heat is extreme – often fifty degrees Celsius. There are strict rules to protect runners. A minimum daily intake of two thousand calories is insisted on, and you're provided with twenty-five litres of water. You carry all your food and personal things in a backpack, and you generally run in groups. The organisers make you undergo medical check-ups every ten or so kilometres, but you can't avoid risks completely. It's easy to get lost because of unclear tracks, and if you get caught in sandstorms, you have to stay where you are until things clear. There's plenty of information online about what to do during the race. I couldn't actually take in all the advice, but I did have some routines I stuck to. I always started mornings with strong coffee and protein-rich cereals. I also swallowed salt tablets, which are good for your muscles and energy levels. Then I cleaned and dried my toes, soles and heels carefully. In the evenings, after the day's run, the first thing I did was make a recovery milk shake – I mixed water with powdered milk, carbohydrates and proteins. I also propped my legs up for a while – that helps improve your blood flow and bring down any swelling in your joints. Also, I always washed my T-shirt, shorts and socks, so they'd be fresh the next day. I must admit that I sometimes felt like giving up – at certain critical moments, I wondered whether not listening to warnings from friends had been a mistake. Now though, a year on, the only things I'm sorry about are that I hadn't packed spare shoes – the ground we camped on was so rough to walk on – and also that I hadn't paced myself better during the early stages. But overall, I'm very pleased I took part. An important aspect involved raising awareness and money for environmental and social projects – that was very worthwhile. Also, overcoming an injury was a major achievement. I twisted my knee early on as I was avoiding snakes – there are lots in the desert. Ultimately, I made it to the finishing line.

Texts for Question 23

(adult female)

I know many of you are fans of comics – like super-hero stories and Japanese manga. I also know some of you like creating your own comics, so I thought you'd be interested in a student comic illustration competition. The organisers want to provide teenage illustrators with an opportunity to show their comics to wider audiences. They also want to bring aspiring teenage illustrators together and get them to share ideas with their peers. The competition is divided into two age groups: eleven to fifteen and sixteen to nineteen. Entries from the former can be hand-drawn illustrations and paintings. Comics drawn by hand can also be entered by the older age group, but digital art is also welcome from this group, as is photography as a basis for comic illustration. Entries must be on a specific theme. Some interesting examples inspired by the concept of 'the long road' can be found on the organisers' website – they were from a similar competition held in China. Your work, though, needs to be about 'the city limits' – that should be stimulating. The website gives details on submission of work. The period for registering is between the first of March and May the thirtieth, and work can be handed in at any point between March the fifteenth and June the twenty-fifth. The tenth of July is when they'll be announcing the results. Your artwork must fit onto one A3-sized sheet of paper, and it can be one large image or a series of up to eight smaller ones. Another consideration is the format you submit your work in. Your work has to be sent in as a PDF file, so you may need a scanner. What criteria will the judges use? Well, they're interested in how new your idea is and your artistic expression of it. At the same time, they'll look at technical achievement, so you'd need to bear that in mind. They'll also consider the extent to which your entry is about the topic chosen for the competition. There are a couple of additional rules I should mention. Students are permitted to work in pairs to produce comic illustrations, though they shouldn't work in groups. Also, if you do something you'd like other people to see, there are no objections to you publishing it on the school website. Posting it on social media is not allowed, though. I would strongly encourage you all to think about entering this competition.

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