**Higher Writing Portfolio : exemplars with commentaries**

**Points to note:**

* **2 pieces: 1 creative + 1 discursive**
* **Creative: personal/reflective/imaginative**
* **Discursive: argumentative, persuasive, report**
* **Max 1300 words: stop reading at 10% over**
* **Teacher support restricted (as with current Higher)**
* **Marked holistically + positively**
* **Each piece marked out of 15- all numbers can be used**
* **Only 3 ‘pass’ categories (Current Higher has 4)**

**Assessment of Higher Portfolio Pieces**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Current Higher** | **New Higher** |
| **Cat 1 : 25** | **Cat 1 : 15-13** |
| **Cat 2: 21 , 23** | **Cat 2: 12-10** |
| **Cat 3 : 17, 19** | **Cat 3 : 9-7** |
| **Cat 4: 13, 15** | **Cat 4: 6-4**  |
| **Cat 5 : 9,11** | **Cat 5 : 3-1 \*\*** |
| **Cat 6 : 5,7** | **0 \*\*** |

**Key words: Cat 1: committed/strong/evident command/full/skilfully/effective/comprehensive/confident and varied/clear and sustained**

**Cat 2: clear/successful (to create impact)/confident/careful/engaged**

**Cat 3: adequate/successful**

**Cat 4: limited**

**Note: not much difference in terms of marks between eg. 10 and 13. Have to use our judgement.**

**Example 1) : Creative : Lady In Waiting**

She sits alone. She is quiet, savouring the stillness of her perfectly neat home. Pins wouldn’t dare drop here. Everything is beautifully arranged, in balance and proportion. Almost geometric, but for a snag on one thread, one corner of one curtain at her window on the world. This tiny flaw she allows, because she caused it to exist. It reminds her of her power. She could have straightened it with a twitch of her long fingers.

Precision maintained. Almost symmetry. She has made it that way. No fuss, no frills. Things as they should be. Sitting there, her feet arranged neatly under her, she could be asleep, dozing gently in the way of the elderly. Dreaming of her youth, lost in a nostalgic haze. But no. even when resting, she is always alert. Even when they seem closed, her eyes are slightly open. She is in control. Not just of her home, but of every aspect of her life. Nothing will change unless she decrees it so. Deliberately. The home, the good home, is a reflection of the self and she is nothing if not deliberate. She sits, every nerve tingling. Though every limb appears limp and languid on the surface, there are tight muscles underneath, poised and waiting. Waiting for the visitor, the next innocent to fall within her reach. It is a hard world out there after all, and there will always be new victims, silly fools who come too close to her. She knows the ones to select, the ones on their own. Those without family to miss them, who could disappear so easily. The trusting ones who just do not understand the signs. Yet perhaps there is not enough to warn the unwary. Her home does not stand out, in her cul-de-sac – though she’s never liked that word – too jointed, not smooth and silky – there are many homes like it, perhaps all concealing their secrets. Many solitary dwellers, sitting quietly with their thoughts. Many ladies in waiting. Clicking in their knitting circles, lying into spinning needles, sharp toothed. She knows herself to be judgemental, she scorns the others like her, but why should she feel any fellow feeling with them? And who else is there to trust? Ultimately she can rely only on herself.

When the moment is right, she will make her move. All of her victims have been killed neatly. With speed and efficiency. Some struggle, some seem oblivious to their imminent death. But they all end the same way. One stab and silence.

She does not like the term serial killer. A meaningless label, born out of media hysteria. Her kind may be demonised, be the stuff of children’s nightmares and fantasy horrors, but that is because most of those people out there do not trouble themselves to understand. Anyone else in her position would do the same as she does. It is not madness, it is necessity. Instinct. But she knows that people would not sympathise. Some would call her a monster, if they knew. Others might think her beautiful, the ones with specialised ‘tastes’.

And who is it that she destroys? Anyone valuable? Or are they not rather vermin, despised by the whole human race, if they are honest? But all would fear her if they knew how much pleasure she took from the kill. Yet her solitude is welcome to her, a rich warmth. She does not need friends. She has no time for companions. Silence suits her thoughts better than the inane sound of chatter, and it was inane, when she could stand to listen.

She has not always been alone. Once she was part of a large family. They thrived together. She remembered, when she cared to, the clutch of her mother like a net, the lack of her father, all those other children – were they really her sisters? Gone now, for the better, to their own corners of the world, some dead in the dust. Then her own children. Yes, once she gave life, she who now relishes the taking of it. But now they have lost touch. No visiting, no birthday treats, no mother’s day cards. But she’d never felt herself to be much of a mother – her children, though they hadn’t quite fled the nest, drifted away. Even hatred would have been a relationship, but caring was not something done in their family, not in their blood. And would she want them to return now? That would be…well, inconvenient. They had no place with her now

And then there had been her lover, the dark mysterious one out of the shadows. He was constant in his attentions, eager to please her, he would have still been with her now…but she always knew how it had to end. He had been her first victim. She still remembered his passion, the strength of his embrace. The way he enveloped her with his love. His ferocity, matched by her own. The hunger. And then she struck, when he least expected it. She could still remember the shocked look on his face, his wide-eyed gaze, his body shaking as she delivered the final blow.

There have been many kills since then. Her home still has mementoes of them – who says there’s no sentimentality in murder – not exactly hidden, but not exactly obvious unless you look very carefully. And the next victim never does. Silly, thoughtless creature, blundering blindly. Does she feel pity? No. would anyone feel pity for her? She needs her victims. And they need her, in their way. The harmless need predators. Or at least deserve them. Each one she kills becomes a part of her, as satisfying as a square meal.

She sits alone, with the world going on around her. She has no interest in politics or religion. Her world has a low roof, what is the use in prying it up? War, natural disaster, the ozone layer, the economy – what does she care about these? She has never been moved by the sight of the birds flying overhead or the sunset. Keeping her house perfect, ready for the next visitor, is all that matters.

There was a time when she used to venture outside, to travel further afield. But no longer. Now she prefers the warmth and security of her home, her world. Now she waits for the excitement to come to her. Is she less adventurous now? Has she lost her touch? Well, that was what happened when you got older.

She knows she will remain secret and safe. Here, in the darkest recess of the cellar, no one disturbs her as she sits among the quivering, tensile threads of her web.

**Creative : Lady in Waiting**

Content:

* committed attention to purpose …strong creative qualities
* Evident command of the genre

Style:

* Linguistic features of genre used skilfully to create a strong impact
* Confident and varied expression
* Effective structure – enhances meaning

Cat 1 :Mark: 15

**Example 2) : Creative(Reflective): I’m Dull**

I’m dull. Boring. A wet blanket. If I were a pet, I’d be a rock (and not even an exciting one at that, no moss on it or anything); if I were a traffic light, both my read and green would be broken, leaving just a disappointing abyss of amber. There’s no use trying to hide it; eventually my true colours (probably just varying shades of brown) will shine through. This haze of tedium which I exude, and the over awareness of it which has tormented me for many years, have twisted me into the insecure, socially awkward person that I am now.

There was a distant time before the fire in my soul – or whatever it is which keeps people interesting – cooled to a few tepid embers. I remember – though can’t quite comprehend – being completely at ease with myself. I could talk for millennia about something, without a thought directed towards the unfortunate person at the other end of my monologue. As I was a God of conversation, to catch even a snippet of my profound and worldly insights was a true blessing. But however narcissistic and precocious I was, and whatever superiority complex I must have had, I was happy. With no guard of pretend interestingness to keep in place, I could live blissfully and carelessly in the moment, something I find hard to say now.

So I try to find solutions to my dullness: analysing interactions, like scientific data, to find the key to good conversations; goading fate to throw me into embarrassing situations – purely to use as amusing anecdotes in my next doomed attempt at social conquest; even mentally rehearsing everyday expressions and phrases to strengthen the façade of my social normality and jovial, easy going manner. Fitting in with the vast mass of apparently confident, ongoing, interesting people I pretend to be part of has become my sole objective in life, and has really affected my outlook. My capacity for enjoying life and any impulsive spontaneity have been reduced to an empty husk of pretence and a strained failure of an attempt to be good company. I often imagine that, rather than living my life, I’m merely orchestrating it – like a conductor trying to control a band, but not actually playing; or worse – a director of some dreary TV show which no one can believe hasn’t been cancelled yet.

And who knows, maybe if the public becomes fed up with our soap operas’ swarm of affairs and wife beatings and coming-out-on-their-wedding-days and blackmail and baby stealing, it will yearn for a programme about a lacklustre teenager, whose idea of high-tension drama is when ‘Coach Trip’ and ‘Come Dine With Me’ are on TV at the same time.

As introspective as this may sound, I am aware that most, if not all, people will (to varying extents) suffer some infuriating inner burden, dampening their enjoyment of life, whether this is, for example, a compulsive shyness – making public speaking or meeting new people comparable to water-boarding – or an irrational lack of confidence in ability, stifling a real potential for greatness. And I wonder whether, if all the many sufferers dedicate even a modicum of themselves to masking this flaw, what else is lost in the process? Is it merely a diminished happiness, or do we lose something more precious in this self-destruction? How many potential friendships, for example, have been left in the vast lonely limbo of acquaintance-dom because no one had the confidence to make the first move? And how many cures for diseases have been discarded because the discoverers were too modest to shout their ideas out loud?

Probably not too many of these, but you get the idea…

In fact, I can’t imagine any situation in which anyone could prosper due to this Achilles’ heel of insecurity. Perhaps a day will come when someone will find a way to stop global warming for fear of what they will look like in a winter hat, and I will happily stand corrected; but until then I stand firm in my belief that these self-doubts are neither constructive nor beneficial.

So why then do we experience such feelings at all? Why do our brains allow this much unneeded additional stress? Surely with all the disadvantages caused by it, evolution would have found a way to weed it out of our psyche. And why, too, are humans the sole sufferers of this heightened sensitivity? I doubt other animals, be it lions or woodlice, ever feel down due to feelings of inadequacy.

The problem might be that our minds have stopped really evolving: we created an environment for ourselves which no longer required us to be constantly on the look-out for prey or predators, leaving our minds simultaneously alert yet empty – and thus in optimum condition to harbour and breed a multitude of insecurities. The first humans didn’t live in the overpopulated herds we do now; thus, to have more than an extended family grouping together was unlikely. Before farming, our ancestors were hunter-gatherers, investing the majority of their time and energy in finding food. This technique was unreliable and not always successful, so it was vital to be ever aware of any potential hunting opportunities. However, the development of bigger tribal communities meant a greater support and defence system. With this ‘safety in numbers’ established, individual focus shifted from looking out for unknown dangers to avoiding the danger of confrontation or argument within the group. The fundamental animal dominance hierarchy of ‘respect your superiors and disrespect your subordinates’ changed; people had to find ways besides impressing with strength and skill to gain the respect of their peers. Thus our minds went to work on this, but their capacity for ‘useful’ depth of thinking spiralled off into detrimental self-awareness.

I know that in a watered-down form, a sense of self-awareness does in some ways prove advantageous in daily life. However, with our less vital need to be a little over-paranoid about predators lurking in the bushes, our insecurities manifest themselves in extreme, ridiculously redundant ways. This tendency is much like an allergic reaction – although, instead of wheezing and spluttering tiny grains of pollen, we over-think and over-analyse these insignificant mental stimuli. Allergies too, began as a life-saving necessity against real threats. Then they mutated into something evolutionarily redundant, mistaking the innocuous for the insidious, the only result being another bout of blocked noises or – in our mind’s case – social anxiety.

Insecurities are universal, and sometimes it seems that a major part of humanity is fighting a more-or-less constant battle against their interference in everyday life. For all I know, I may not be as mind-numbingly boring as I think I am, but this knowledge is no comfort, nor does it solve my obsession with the affliction or make life more enjoyable. It is troubling to think that so many of my fellow human beings are suffering similarly, and I do wonder what life would be like if we could stop caring about these insignificant traits. If we could all lead happily straightforward lives, enriched by a placid acceptance of things as they are, and not undermined by the tendrils of self-doubt which curl around us, gaining hold and slowly strangling…If only we… but I won’t bore you any longer.

**Personal Essay : I’m dull…**

Content:

* Committed attention to purpose…strong creative qualities
* Thematic concerns which are clearly introduced and developed
* Ideas/feelings experiences explored with a strong degree of mature reflection and self awareness
* writer’s personality and individuality

Style:

* Linguistic features of genre used skilfully to create a strong impact
* Confident and varied expression
* Effective structure – enhances meaning

Cat 1 :Mark : 15

**Example 3) : Discursive Essay: ‘The Riots’**

“This is criminality, pure and simple, and it has to be confronted and defeated” – Prime Minister David Cameron.

During the beginning of August 2011, a surge of violent disorder arose from a peaceful protest outside Tottenham in London. Within days, major cities in England had been flooded with unrest, as rioters as young as eleven boasted about their antics on national television. Cars and buses burned, shops looted and destroyed, and buildings vandalised. The behaviour of the rioters has left the wider public with the strong impression that they were just undisciplined thugs badly in need of punishment. But is it that simple?

It began as a peaceful protest against the shooting of Mark Duggan by police. Two hundred people demanded to be addressed by a senior police officer, and waited several hours as they were left unsatisfied by the level of authority of the police they spoke to. A few hours later a pack of young people carrying weapons had arrived. After an alleged attack on a teenage girl by police, a wave of aggression built up in the crowd, and erupted into a riot. This was the cause of many more conflicts in several other areas throughout London. By 9th of August chaos had spread to numerous cities up and down the country. It has since become apparent that, amongst many of these rioters there exists a sense of exclusion, suggesting that they feel undervalued in modern day society. If exclusion played a major role in the lead up to the riots, there are a number of underlying factors to be explored if we are to understand what happened and why.

It has become obvious that many young people do not feel a strong connection with the wider community that they live in. it can be argued that isolation from work and education does not allow many members of the younger generation to build the skill set ad values gained through hard work. This allows them to identify with working people, enabling them to feel more involved in bigger issues, such as tax cuts. In areas that suffered disturbances, there were strong concentrations of youth unemployment, such as areas of London, like Hackney and Brixton. In areas like these the percentage of household containing both an individual aged sixteen and over in employment and another who is unemployed or not in education is higher than any other region in Great Britain at 31.1 per cent, rising to 33.2 per cent in Outer London. In Birmingham, the claimant rate was at 12.8% while the rest of the UK was at 5.6% (2011), and Manchester’s unemployment rate stood at 28% which can also be compared to the rest of the UK, which was 20% (2011). As rioters were overwhelmingly male and jobless, this suggests that although people may have numerous explanations for rioting, a central one, according to sociologist Dr Paul Bagguley from the University of Leeds, is “that there’s nothing else for them to do”. Although unemployment does not *cause* riots, reports suggest that conditions in the most under-privileged parts of England are such that they feel justified in rioting. Feeling excluded from society, they have no stake in society – and because of this they feel no loyalty to their community. Thus, they will feel no remorse for their actions during riots. However, it would be naïve to suggest that all – or even most – of the rioters were motivated by a burning desire to improve the lot of the poor around them.

It Is not likely that people who go out and steal from others around them, feel the need to change the world. They are simply looking out for themselves. However, feeling isolated from society can lead to rejection of that society’s values. If the government fails to recognise the depths of social exclusion, then the UK is in danger of losing another generation to unemployment and wasted ambition. Despite the government’s inability to realise the implications of this, affected youth have shown that they are more insightful and feel the full force of social exclusion. Further public spending cuts will just increase the depression and anger: this is expressed in the words of one of the rioters; “There’s no jobs…but still they want to cut benefits. We ain’t got no way to survive and it’s like no-one don’t care about us. There’s injustice and we’ve had enough”.

Perhaps we should look even deeper, at the rampant need for possessing items of momentary value which seem to dominate our culture. We are dominated by consumerism, the attachment to materialistic possessions, and the destructive urges this creates shown by the vast number of shops that were looted. Our society concentrates on material possessions over community, uses money and assets as a measure of someone’s success and fails to instil a sense of purpose in British Youth. In my opinion, there needs to be a drastic change of focus from material to non-materialistic values. Adverts all around us can promote an unrealistically luxurious lifestyle, while people are made to believe that they need materialistic goods to be on a par with everyone else, and constant bombarding reminds them of the differences between the wealthy and the needy in society. This should prompt us to ask ourselves, what values are we all choosing to live by? By emphasising the kind of success that comes with money we are isolating those who fail to achieve that success further, while making it dangerously desirable to them. Currently, we are driving our youth away from an alternative type of ‘success’, good morals and values. By raising costs and making cuts in benefits – crime becomes an easy option to turn to. As a result, young people are more prone to becoming criminals as they aspire to a lifestyle they cannot hope to achieve on benefits or basic rate wages. Also, we have allowed our youth to develop the opinion that we can expect something for nothing, meaning that they feel they are entitled to certain luxuries without earning them. They fail to realise the sense of pride of working hard to earn something. But who can blame them when there is a lack of parental guidance> and who can blame them when they are constantly encouraged to obtain the trappings of “success” which they see advertised around them constantly?

One reaction to the riots was shown by David Cameron’s speech on Tuesday 9th August, as he addressed the ‘thugs’. From this, we can see that no underlying factors were considered, and that those taking part in the riots were just dismissed. Yet, the lack of equality that has developed within British society suggests that many young people feel alienated from the Government and the ethos of work. This could perhaps be because they are not interested in the wider problems that the country may face; they may even feel it is “boring”. Since the current voting age is at eighteen, do the government care about sixteen and seventeen year olds’ opinions? Even is they may have left home, and have children? However, to dismiss them is dangerous: young people may not feel any respect towards the law and the authorities, causing more behavioural issues, increased crime, and further alienation. In conclusion, I feel that the build-up of social exclusion through the effects of consumerism, and youth unemployment were the central causes of the violent disorder experienced last year. While socio-economic factors may partially explain rioting, they certainly do not justify it. Nonetheless, to reject those factors as irrelevant and dismiss the riots as ‘criminality, pure and simple’ is to miss the important point – and to perpetuate the alienation which could lead to a dangerous future.

**Discursive Essay : The Riots**

Content:

* Committed attention to purpose
* Full understanding and engagement
* Evidence of full research and selection, as appropriate
* Clear and sustained line of thought

Style:

* Linguistic features used comprehensively to persuade and convey depth and complexity of thought
* Effective structure which enhances meaning

Cat 1 : Mark : 15

**Example 4) : Discursive Writing : ‘The Internet’**

Is the Internet Ruining the World?

The internet. All of a sudden we can’t live without it, when for thousands of years we have been doing just fine. In our quickly developing world, technology is becoming a bigger and bigger part of everyday human life. Access to the web is becoming something we can’t function without. People need to be connected, and the more connected they become the more connected they feel they need to be. Is the internet really improving our lives? Or has it reached its full potential and beginning to make a start for the worse?

The internet has completely taken over things that used to be thought of as important, and almost rendered them useless. A few examples include; newspapers, books, libraries, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, telephone directories, the practice of writing letters, actually meeting with people. The list goes on. The value that a book once had as an object of art and creativity is being destroyed. It used to be a thing people treasured and respected but when it is just easily obtainable for free on the Internet, it undermines the importance of the time and intelligence that were spent to create it. Libraries could become more and more desolate as the amount of information available on the net increases, the less people will rely on books that have served as hundreds of thousands of books in the world can exist in a single hard drive occupying the same amount of space as one book. If newspapers and books and everything requiring paper can be stored in vast amounts on one device, it decreases the energy that would be used to manufacture the books. Not everyone thinks this is a good enough reason though. Staring at a screen just isn’t the same as a treasured, battered, well-read book. It is much harder to feel sentimental towards a cold, characterless, electronic device than it is a book, soft and worn, as any lover of literature will maintain.

Another issue that is becoming apparent with the internet is one concerning social networking sites. At first they seem like fantastic ways for keeping in touch with distant friends and family, and if used in this way they are. The problem arises when people get sucked into the void of reading about what other people are doing. People they don’t know or care about. This act of just being buried in a phone is something that is extremely current in my generation. There is some kind of addictive quality to these sites that causes an uncontrollable urge in people to check them constantly to see if anyone might have left them a comment (whether this is in school, on a train, or during a conversation). Once checked, there is no satisfaction or pleasantness associated. On countless occasions my peers have said to me “I go on facebook too much…I don’t even know why – I hate it”. Even with this attitude they can’t stop going on it. Usage of these sites means that now you don’t even need to meet up to have a chat with a friend you don’t see often, because you can just talk to them online. These sites encourage people to talk about themselves and what they are doing, which encourages other people to read what they’re doing. Constantly reading about how much fun people you don’t care about are having is an unhealthy way to spend your time that could be spent instead conversing with your real friends. In real life. This decrease in socialising normally is creating a generation that would rather talk to a person via ascreen than go enrich their lives outside, or play or even talk face-to-face with someone. Most young people are almost unable to hold a conversation but are able to text non-stop. Why talk to one person when you can text ten others? Children choosing to stay in and surf the net is especially worrying as child obesity rates are rising and the more numbers of youngsters with computers will only leave us with unhealthy, overweight and socially inept adults.

Aspects of the internet that are considered widely to be the qualtities include the fact information can be sent and received in seconds, usually for free. This is mostly a fantastic thing – for example in a career that involves economics, being one step ahead of the game is an invaluable asset, and the instantaneousness of the internet can provide somebody with the essential news. However because almost everyone has access to the net, all it does is puts everyone a step behind each other. People in these kind of jobs are forced to always be in the scoop, and obliged to be constantly contactable in case something major happens. This constant pressure means people are always stressed, as they can’t afford to be ignorant, even for a fraction of a second. Everyone is required to work too fast and live too fast, never having a moments rest. This constant pressure means people are always stressed, as they can’t afford to be ignorant, even for a fraction of a second. Everyone is required to work too fast and live too fast, never having a moments rest. This blink-of-an-eye required to work too fast and live too fast, never having a moments rest. This blink-of-an-eye access is also turning people rude, impatient, and in constant need of entertainment and instant gratification. As soon as someone becomes bored, they immediately take out the iPhone and begin mindlessly tapping away and shutting themselves off from the world around them. No time is spent or pondering or wondering or caring, because this isn’t interesting enough. Becoming shut off to their surroundings is meaning people no longer strike up a conversation with a stranger, and so are missing chance to make interesting acquaintances and losing the ability to interact with another human being, never mind the things that may pass them by outside the window on a bus journey. Always being elsewhere than wherever we are is a waste of time. Be present. Be here.

I imagine when I am middle-aged and in the mood for reminiscing I will look back on my time as a young child and remember days when going out and climbing a tree were the best things you could find to do with a day. When riding your bike and going swimming were things you did because you enjoyed them, not because there was a need for health gain. Now people are so wrapped up in their gadgets and online “friends”, they would avoid a conversation with a stranger just so that they would actually have to interact with a fellow human in real life.

In conclusion, if the internet isn’t taking over the world, it’s taken over the world and there’s nothing we can do about it. All we can do is make sure we don’t get trapped in the electronic world of online friends and remember all the things that really matter and make us happy. My greatest fear is that children growing uo in this seemingly better world will lose the desire to socialise, and we will end up with a society that doesn’t know how to interact with each other and be no better off for it. The world wide web has provided us with so many benefits, whereas the bad aspects lie wrapped up in our own private lives and the covertly depressing world of the web, we have stopped giving ourselves the time to do nothing, just to think and work things out, and improve our minds. I think this is solely the internet’s greatest capacity – it has made our lives vastly easier, but at the expense of what makes being human really special.

**Discursive Essay: The Internet**

Content:

* Committed attention to purpose
* Full understanding and engagement
* Clear and sustained line of thought

Style:

* Linguistic features used comprehensively to discuss and convey insight
* Confident and varied expression
* Effective structure which enhances meaning Cat 1 : Mark : 15

**Example 5) : Discursive : ‘Supermarkets- Is it a Fair Deal?’**

Supermarkets – Is It a Fair Deal – Discursive

In Britain we like convenience, we want fast food, fast cars, fast internet and don’t want to spend our time waiting for something. “Today fifty percent of towns have five supermarkets” thanks to this we need not go far for the weekly shop. Yet, there are people who feel this should not be the case. They feel that Britain is overrun by Supermarket giants. But is this opposition justified? Are supermarkets in Britain too powerful?

The price wars among British supermarkets are fierce. With supermarkets battling for every penny we have they have driven down their own prices to meet the demanding consumers’ shopping habits. As a result of these wars for ever cheaper food, the price the producer is paid is shrinking. The most concerning situation is the price of milk. At fifty percent per litre, the farmer is “on average getting paid twenty six point two pence per litre”. This is a measly return that leaves our dairy farmers struggling to survive. The dairy farmer is on average making a three pence loss on each litre of milk produced. This is caused directly by the hammering down of the price of milk and other products on the supermarket shelves. In the battle to beat the price of their competitors, their rivals must follow suit.

The most significant price war is between Tesco and Asda. We are bombarded by adverts proclaiming that Asda or Tesco have so many items cheaper than their nearest competitor. Shopping trends are dictated by this with people looking to save that little bit of money, even more so in a recession. So, if these supermarkets are pushing down their prices then surely they would be making less money. On the contrary, both Asda and Tesco are making massive profits. Tesco announced pre-tax profits amounting to three point four billion for the 12 months to the end of February, a ten point one percent rise on last year. Amazingly British dairy farmers will not ever see one penny of this.

Many supermarkets are also looking to put their second, third or even fourth store in a town or city. More supermarkets equal more jobs equal more money for the company. Employment in a time of recession is a major factor. If a supermarket can demonstrate that a new store will provide more jobs then it will generally get the go-ahead from the planners.

“In 2004 small grocery shops had a turnover of around £21 billion and employed more than 500,000people. Tesco alone has a turnover of around £29 billion yet they only employ around 700,000 people…Tesco own 30% of the grocery market.”

This shows that the supermarkets can delegate roles extremely well. It shows that a small industry such as grocery shops can have just a few thousand less workers yet make a few billion pounds less. Highlighting supermarkets have so much influence they now effectively control and dominate the employment.

The impact of a large supermarket chain opening up in a town can be devastating. Local shops are powerless against the giants. Prices at the new store will be much lower and people will be attracted by this, meaning local shops lose loyal customers; poached by the giants. Another supermarket hook is the short stay car parks which means that supermarket customers will have little time to shop anywhere else other than the supermarket. The most obvious impact from the opening of supermarkets is on the local shops in the immediate vicinity of the supermarket, but many other traditional stores such as butchers, greengrocers, fishmongers and related businesses notice a change.

Let’s face it if a person can buy at least half of the products cheaper in a supermarket there’s no financial incentive in using the smaller shops, is there?

These businesses may each support several families of workers and being put out of business has a far reaching effect on the town.

The location of supermarkets is sometimes more important than what they sell. Easily accessible Greenfield or Brownfield sites are cheap to build on and are at a premium. Supermarkets are top of the list to secure these sites in a bidding war. They can show the highest return on investment per square metre and after all everyone needs to eat. An accessible supermarket that provides cheaper food than other smaller shops is now the aim for supermarkets and if they met this criteria they are a force to be reckoned with.

Supermarkets, being the unselfish corporations that they are, like to share their profits with their loyal customers through the rewards system. For every pound you spend in-store customers accumulate points which can contribute to the cost of your next visit.

Supermarket layouts also influence customer shopping habits. The supermarkets use psychological information to almost “feed” the customer information or products. Have you ever walked into a supermarket and wondered why the vegetables are near the front or why the meat and fresh fish counters are at the back? Everything about a supermarket is laid out to make the most amount money from you the customer. So supermarkets are now powerful or clever enough to control your thoughts and habits. Is this too powerful or is it being manipulative?

“Are supermarkets too powerful?” I would say yes. Supermarkets command a huge percentage of their market putting other competitors under unrelenting pressure to make money. This is unfair. Supermarket suppliers are also supressed by the control over pricing that the supermarkets command. A supplier that is “Bullied”, into being paid a lower price by a supermarket buying consortium must make a stand. Dairy farmers, for example, are understandably very angry about their relationship with the supermarkets. Many organisation who work on behalf for British farmers are working on getting a fairer deal for their members. I am of the opinion that supermarkets are too powerful. But could Britain live without them? I think not, but that does not mean that we can allow them to continue as they are. Regulation must be imposed to limit the growth of the supermarkets or a scheme where more of the profit is shared to the producers. Although the convenience factor still remains. We let them do what they want because where else can you go to do your weekly shop, get well priced fuel, get money-saving vouchers, have a coffee…

**Commentary**

The essay begins well- a lively, varied opening paragraph which ends with the candidate asking “Are supermarkets in Britain too powerful?” The remainder of the essay provides the answer “yes”, while conceding that they provide the convenience and economy we all seem to crave.

The essay shows adequate understanding. There is evidence of relevant research and it appears to cover a fair amount of ground. In fact, however, it displays a very selective approach to the topic and is undermined by naivity and a muddled approach in places, for example in the statement that “More supermarkets equal more jobs and more jobs equal more money for the company”. The assertion that farmers are “on average making a three pence loss on each litre” fails to point out the importance of the words “on average”. The belief that lower prices should mean lower profits – and the amazement that profits are not passed on to producers – suggests a slightly naïve handling of the material.

The paragraph dealing with the effects on small local traders, makes a well known basic point, but seems to undercut itself with what looks like an unsourced quote. The essay then appears to switch to advantages of supermarkets, without appropriate linkage. There is also a degree of confusion in “Is this too powerful or is it being manipulative?”

The conclusion gives more evidence of the writer’s slightly muddles line of thought l (“putting other competitors under unrelenting pressure to make money”) and vague hopes for improvement.

Content:

* Adequate attention to purpose
* Adequate understanding
* Evidence of relevant research
* Line of thought (not always clear)

Style:

* Linguistic features adequately used
* Adequate expression and structure

Cat 3 : Mark : 8/15

**Example 6) : Creative : Journey**

The small No. 15 bus that was taking me home this afternoon spluttered slowly along the high street, every now and then pausing for a gasp of air whilst passengers clambered aboard. Its occupants were a haphazard bunch, ranging from an obnoxious, broad set, businessman to an elderly lady swamped in plastic shopping bags.

I was watching a raindrop’s slow progress down the laminated glass when I was distracted by a particularly piercing voice. It was the animated conductor announcing another stop. Suddenly, I realised that this was where I meant to get off. I quickly jostled to the front of the bus, hurriedly sandwiching my handbag under my arm. As I did so, I heard a clink as something fell to the floor. A pen. I stopped down, grabbed the pen and shoved it into the depths of my bag. Then I briefly nodded at the conductor and hopped down off the bus. Behind me, I heard the doors of the No. 15 hiss closed and from the corner of my eye I saw the bus swing abruptly out of the layby.

As I strode briskly down Market Street, I crammed my hand into my bag, searching for my mobile phone to check the time, when my hand touched a cool metal object, the pen I had dropped. I stopped and pulled it out. I vaguely remembered that the pen was a Christmas present from two years ago, nothing special…to anyone else, but to me it marked the beginning of everything…

‘Scott & Co.’ was a small, dingy closet of an office on South Street above Harrison’s Fishmongers. The entire place reeked of fish, instant coffee and Chinese takeout. And it was in ‘Scott & Co.’ that I sat, waiting, in a small claustrophobic room that belonged to a certain Mr Russell.

Cluttered, cramped and confined, just about every surface in the room was covered with an array of thick beige files and sprawling masses of paper. Also dotted amongst the assortment were empty, abandoned coffee mugs and sickly, yellow potted plants. With the majority of Mr Russell’s office taken up by a large plastic folding desk and the only window in the room overlooking a narrow alleyway and the side of the brick building next door, the room smelt of decaying bureaucracy.

After a good half an hour wait, Mr Russell finally entered his office, carrying a stack of files and muttering a stream of curses and complaints. Mr Russell was a harrowed looking man in his late forties, whose whole demeanour suggested just how stressful his life undoubtedly was. He was a relatively tall man, not unhandsome but heavy and his hair was now merely peppered with a few brown strands.

“Hi”, he said briskly as he closed the door behind him and dropped the stack of files on a corner of his desk.

Surprised at his sudden entry, I quickly stood up and offered him my hand “Hello Mr Russell, I’m…”

“So, your name is…”, he glanced down at a list on his desk, ignoring my outstretched hand, “Olivia May, is that correct?”

“Ah, yes, yes, that’s right,” I mumbled embarrassed, sliding my sweaty palm behind my back.

“Right, excellent, now…Olivia, you don’t mind if I call you Olivia, do you?” he said raising an inquiring eyebrow and leaning back in his chair. I shook my head, replying with an overly enthusiastic, “Of course not!” and a false smile.

He glanced briskly at his battered watch and continued, “I have ten minutes, Olivia, till my next meeting. I need you to tell me in five, why you should get this job.”

I paused.

He smiled, waiting in anticipation for my answer, watching me flounder with smug satisfaction.

I racked my brain for something, anything that might, at least, clinch some possibility of this job. I needed the money – to pay the rent, to pay all those student loans, to get by. Without a job as a source of income, I had no money. But it was more than just a matter of money. It was what my parents had always wanted for me: a job as a lawyer. But five minutes, five minutes just didn’t seem enough. Of course, had a certain someone been on time, I would not…but that wasn’t the point, all I had was five minutes. How could five minutes mean so much? But they didn’t have to…

“You know what, Mr Russell, I don’t want to make you late for your meeting. Thank you very much for the opportunity, I really appreciate it.” I smiled trying to suppress a grin but failing as I saw his brow furrow in confusion, “You just helped me avoid what could have been the biggest mistake of my life”.

And then I just left. I opened the office door and walked into sunshine.

Yes, the future was uncertain. But at the same time, I had never been so sure in my life. Yes, I had no guaranteed job lined up. But I would rather that, than have a job and resent every minute of my working existence like Mr Russell. The entire time o had been torn between what my parents had wanted me to do and what I had always dreamed of doing. I wanted to teach, to touch young people’s lives in the way that made me happy too.

I stood outside the offices of “Scott & Co.” and rifled through my coat pocket to find the envelope, which enclosed the application for teacher’s training. It was complete, ready to send off, just missing the signature at the bottom. I walked up the street to the nearby post box.

Leaning against the post box, I pulled out a cool metal pen, a Christmas present from my parents, and signed the form. It was done. I slipped the sheet back into the envelope, sealed it and without a second glance pushed it through the smiling mouth of the post box.

**Commentary:**

This short story shows clear creative qualities and insight into the genre from the start: it is a first person narrative concerning a young woman’s career-changing epiphany, when the prospect of working in a law office is rejected in favour of becoming a teacher so that she can “touch young people’s lives” and be “happy”.

Insight into the genre continues: there is structural control achieved by the-symbolic pen; there is focus on a single character and a single event with a clear turning point; there is some attempt to create mood and atmosphere; thematic concerns are introduced and developed in that the narrator, having worked to please her parents, makes the decision to follow her own aspirations. The title hints strongly at both the literal journey with which the story begins and the metaphorical journey to independence.

Within these positive features, however, there are some weaknesses, such as the slightly unsophisticated character development. Also, while the descriptions of both the office (claustrophobic) and its occupant (stressed and tetchy) are such that her decision to reject working in the law has some credibility, there is perhaps something slightly overdone about these- and the writer slips into telling the reader how the character feels, ‘surprised…embarrassed’.The conclusion is, on the one hand, neat in that it returns to the pen highlighted in the opening (with the added twist that her parents’ present is being used to defy them). Thus the clear structure enhances the meaning of the story.

Content:

* Clear creative qualities and insight into the genre
* Thematic concerns introduced and developed

Style:

* Linguistic features of the genre used successfully to create impact
* (Mostly) confident expressions
* Clear structure which enhances meaning

Cat 2 (middle) 11/15

**Example 7 ) : Creative : The Eternal City**

She wasn’t coming. He had been waiting for twenty minutes, perched half-way up the marble cliff of steps that spilled down into the bustling plaza below him. The lavender next to him, slightly overgrown after a long Italian summer, had begun to taint the smoke of the cigarette which he held loosely in his left hand, forgotten. The August evening was beginning to make his creased linen suit oppressive. He drew on the cigarette and took his watch out of his pocket. Twenty three minutes; she wasn’t coming. He wiped the sweaty fingerprints from his watch with his pocket handkerchief, and surveyed the plaza, eyes jolting around the crowd below him. He turned and looked back over his slouched shoulders, desperately searching for the cascade of brown-blonde hair. Nothing.

He dropped the cigarette n a devil-may-care way, and shuffled down the steps, looking back repeatedly as though he had a nervous twitch. No; she definitely wasn’t coming. He wouldn’t hear that voice saunter effortlessly through the Roman night. That unique frequency that seemed to make a simple greeting sound like a promise of so much more; a husky whisper of desire.

“James?” He stopped, lurched from his shuffling walk by the gentle reverberations. Looking up, he saw the woman who had dominated, tormented, his thoughts for the last fifteen months. Her alluring green eyes seemed to drag him inexorably down the steps; the clattering of his brogues reaching a climax just before coming to a stop in front of her. “Hello.” He ventured, immediately chiding himself – two thousand miles and all that he could say was, “Hello.” Her slight nose and high cheekbones, as well as those pouting eyes were visible beneath the wide brim of her black het. He looked down in shame. The huskiness broke the awkward silence: “How nice of you to come.”

“Oh, not at all, nice to see you.” He broke out in an offhand manner that increased the formality of his words. “Shall we?” they set off into the night, as she passed a gloved arm through his.

The evening slipped effortlessly into the early hours of the morning as the dulcet tones continued from the dinner table to the dance hall. James drew her close as the jazz slowed to a more sombre tune, and slipping his hand around her waist as they moved into a stilted waltz. The dance hall closed and they glided under the gaslights down unnamed marble streets, past innumerable obelisks and fountains, through unidentifiable squares. Lost in the Roman night, James finally stopped. After fifteen months the time had come. “Look,” he proclaimed, waiting for the echo to cease bouncing around the square before continuing. “I should have said this the last time we were here. All those months ago, last spring. I should have told you that…” He stopped, throat blocked by the quantity and speed of emotions that were trying to get out, hands suddenly clammy. “I…”

“James, I am to be married.” That delightful frequency that had previously carried with it the promise of limitless desire now became the equivocating voice of a trollop. He stood still; not comprehending what she had just said. Hoping it was a figment of his imagination, a joke, a jest, a misread line in the drama of his life. Only the incessant string of “I’m so sorry” spoken with a voice made hoarse with tears, affirmed the reality. He slipped effortlessly from her impassioned pleas, meandering through streets as he looked back on what might have been.

It was only the previous spring that they had met in Babington’s Tea Room next to the Spanish Steps. Only fifteen months before, they had raced back along slippery marble cobbles to the hotel room through the storm rains. They had shed their clothes under the pretext of not wanting to catch a cold. Her wet hair had invitingly framed her radiant face. Her ample bosom had heaved from the effort of the run; her hourglass figure summoned James towards her as they stood in the hall. They kissed, tentatively at first, then passionately and for longer periods. And then in a frenzied haste it had happened in that small room, completing the bond between them.

He wandered on through the streets and arrived back at the hotel. A delicately scrawled note was presented to him: “My dear James,” it ran, “please, darling, forgive me. Meet me again tomorrow.” He threw it nonchalantly at the porter who had just handed him it and stumbled upstairs to the bedroom. And there before him were the remnants of the night that would have been: the now lukewarm water in the Champagne bucket; two clean coupes, one without any trace of lipstick; the turned down bedcovers that had not been thrust aside amid a wild stampede.

The next evening he sat on the steps and once again observed the life below him. His linen suit was creased at the back, the waistcoat was stained with cognac and his hat was pulled far down on his brow to protect him against the radiant sun. He casually tossed a cigarette butt into the bushes at the side of the steps and lit another impatiently. Had the previous day been a simple trick of the mind, or had the bitch actually said it. Was she really getting married? “James?” The husky inquisitive tones carried up the steps towards him. He looked up, her enticing green eyes were hidden beneath wide sunglasses and a black broad brim shaded her face against the piercing evening sun.

He looked up, roused from his thoughts by her alluring voice. He drew himself up wearily, squinting his eyes against the low sun. “Oh.” He muttered, flicking his cigarette in her direction down the stairs, “it’s you darling.” His usually civil manner gave way to biting sarcasm. What he had had as optimism had been converted into bitter cynicism. He turned away, took a swig of cognac from his engraved hipflask and mumbled a final, “Goodbye” before he slunk off up the steps, away from the woman he had desired for so long.

This Essay shows strong creative qualities from the start. Set in Rome, and in a time seemingly in the past, it sets out to explore a relationship which has turned from romantic passion through uncertainty to rejection and bitterness.

The writer shows command of the genre through element such as characterisation, creation of setting and atmosphere and structure. Effective use is made of dialogue eg ‘I am to be married’ which reinforces the personality and social class of James’ enigmatic lover.

For the most part, this is a convincing and sophisticated attempt to explore the emotions of a young man in love with a woman he at first idolises and then comes to realise is not worthy of his attention. The vengeful streak he displays at the conclusion is disturbing but not unrealistic.

Linguistic features are used skilfully to create a strong impact. There is some impressively compact description eg “He wiped the sweaty fingerprints from his watch with his pocket handkerchief”; “[the voice] that seemed to make a simple greeting sound like the promise of so much more”; “two clean coupes, one without any trace of lipstick”. Expression is confident and varied, with only occasional weaker moments eg “the equivocating voice of a trollop”, “her ample bosom”, “threw it nonchalantly”. There is some uncertainty about the punctuation of speech: occasional errors.

Content:

* Strong creative qualities
* Evident command of the genre
* Thematic concerns introduced and developed

Style:

* Linguistic features used skilfully to create a string impact
* Confident and varied expression (very occasional weaknesses)
* Effective structure

Cat 1 : 14/15

**Example 8 ) : Personal/Reflective (Creative) : Anne**

For many teenage girls all over the world, school, friends, money and of course happiness are a priority in life. Without these things many girls claim they could not function. However, one famous teenage girl had only one priority in her life…survival.

The sun sparkled on the deep blue waters of one of the many twisting canals in the beautiful city of Amsterdam. It was an uncharacteristically warm April day and many tourists and locals fled to the streets like dogs to a carcass to bask in the sunshine. Some went for a picnic with a loved one; others opted for a more energetic cycle around the city. It seemed like the perfect day to be spending outside. However, my mum and I were shutting ourselves out of this glorious sunshine and happiness. We exchanged the squeals and laughter for solemn silence. The light turned to darkness as we planned ion visiting one of Amsterdam’s most famous museums, Anne Frank’s House.

When we approached the museum a long line of visitors stretched as far as the eye could see. As we took our place in the queue a sudden rush of realism hit me. All of these people were here to see the hiding place of one of the most famous authors in the world. The buzz of the crowd built up the excitement of the trip; the slurs of alien languages surrounding us all discussing of the same thing. People from different walks of life came together as if in pilgrimage to Anne. Rounding the corner and entering the museum the crowds of excited visitors seemed to transform into calmer and more solemn versions of themselves. Deathly silence. This mark of respect touched me and made me realise how emotional and hard hitting this museum was going to be.

Walking around the lower floors of the factory it felt I had stepped back in time to the war era. Everything there I had seen in museums before: old and worn paperwork, subtly chipped crockery and the usual delicate ornament shielded behind a wall of glass. Every room was bustling with tourists analysing every detail and engrossed in the interesting facts about Anne’s pre-war life. We then turned a corner and entered a small room; the familiar sight of the famous bookcase that separated Anne and her family from the forces of the Nazis stood solitary, concealing its dark past. This seemingly insignificant bookcase looked incapable of concealing Anne’s family. The thought that a worn old bookcase was the only thing protecting Anne for so long from the clutches of the Nazis was unbelievable. Then, looking at the bookcase I realised that Anne had touched this bookcase sixty years ago to go into hiding, but that it was also touched by the Gestapo as they led her to her death.

From here we were split into sections and were taken up to the Annex group by group. As our turn approached we caught our first glimpse of how horrible the Frank family’s life was for the two years they spent in hiding. There was a dark, dismal staircase that seemed to be leading nowhere and a room off to the right which was crowded with visitors all looking around in a mixture of silence and dismay. However, it was the sight of the staircase that hit me hardest. My gaze was fixed on the dull, worn, wooden stairs. This was probably the last thing Anne saw of civilisation and where she would have last seen her family before she was led to her untimely death. These stairs were the beginning of the end for Anne. A wave of emotion hit me and a bitter tear trickled down my face. I was trembling as we climbed up the stairs. They seemed so iconic in the way that they saved Anne as she ran up them to hide, but, they were her path to death as she walked down them for the last time.

At the top of the stairs was a kitchen, dining room and bedroom all rolled into one. The difference in atmosphere from the lower floors was palpable. Silence. Not a word, not a sound could be heard. Everyone was simply stunned by the condition that the Frank family had endured for so long. In my head, however, it was he loudest place I’d ever ben. In comparison to the conditions that we have in the 21st century it was a completely different world. Every room was cramped and dingy. Cold in the winter and undisputedly warm in the summer, I had never experienced anywhere quite like the Annex.

Walking into Anne’s room was very hard. I knew that Anne was aged 13 to 15 when she was in the Annex but it was upon entering her bedroom that I realised she was just a normal teenager. There were two beds at each side of the tiny room. The yellow faded wallpaper torn at the corners seemed to be the only sign of brightness and happiness in the Annex. Anne also had pictures of film stars and the people she idolised on her wall. In the corner was the desk where she would retreat each day to write in her sacred diary. It is clear that Anne was just a typical teenage girl like me. I have posters of my favourite bands and pictured of friends and family on my wall; I have a desk where I do my homework and studying. This close comparison allowed me to relate to Anne and appreciate her situation so much more by realising that it could have been me hiding from death in the Annex. Anne was only born sixty years previous to me which means that, unfortunately, she was caught up in one of history’s biggest disasters.

A corridor from Anne’s haven led us out to a small room which was completely empty apart from a white pedestal in the middle of the room containing something breath-taking. A spotlight shone down through the glass case and illuminated Anne Frank’s diary. Approaching it I felt nervous. Seeing something that had been so sacred to your idol is unbelievable. Looking down on one of the tattered pages I could decipher names and drawings but that was all. Everything was written in German but that didn’t matter to me. To see the delicate handwriting of such a famous writer was so special. It sent a shiver down my spine. I had only read some parts of the diary before but I was very familiar with Anne’s story. It was just my mum and I with Anne’s diary which was haunting but very sacred for me. All of the crowds and faces we had seen before seemed to have evaporated for this moment. Being alone with the diary made me feel like Anne was reading it to me. I felt a connection with her.

On our way out we stopped at the museum gift shop where I bought a copy of Anne’s diary, which I have read twice since my visit. As we entered back into the sunshine and happiness I couldn’t help but feel a little bit selfish about stepping out of the house when it is something Anne could have only dreamt about in the two years she spent in hiding.

In her diary Anne wrote: “I’m trying very hard to change myself, but I’m always up against a more powerful enemy…”

I think Anne’s sentiments speak to many teenage girl in any corner of the world. The visit to Anne’s house put perspective on my life as I realise how much Anne endured in her life and how resilient she remained throughout. She is a heroine in my eyes, and someone we can all learn from.

**Commentary**:

This essay is an adequate account of the writer’s visit to the Anne Frank Museum in which the writer’s experience is explored with an adequate sense of reflection and involvement. The candidate reflects on what she sees and on how her understanding of Anne’s situation has been deepened.

The explicit reflection (“I was trembling …”; “Walking into Anne’s room was very hard”, “I felt nervous”, “… sent a shiver down my spine”) is rather laboured and unconvincing. However, the level of implicit reflection is at times impressive, eg the “seemingly insignificant bookcase” that was “also touched by the Gestapo” and the remark that in her head the silent room was “the loudest place I’d ever been in”.

There is adequate structure with the entering and leaving the museum linked to a move from light to dark and back again. However, the description of Amsterdam (in paragraph 2) to establish the “light” is slightly cliched .

There is evidence elsewhere of cliché and less successful expression, eg “her untimely death”, “a bitter tear trickled down my face”.Overall, though, the linguistic features of the genre are used successfully.

There are very few errors – expression is adequate.

Overall, this piece has some genuine reflection, but is weakened by lapses in choice of expression.

Content:

* Adequate attention to purpose and creative qualities- in places rising above adequate
* Shows understanding of the genre
* Adequate expression of writer’s personality

Style:

* Linguistic features used successfully
* Adequate expression and structure

Top end of Cat. 3- 9/15

**Example 9 ) :Aerophobia : Personal/Reflective (Creative)**

Aerophobia. It is a fear that countless people suffer from. It is even more frustrating for sufferers who are generally rational, to feel such a strong sense of helplessness and to be so out of control. For myself, I know that I can spend a while convincing myself that my fear is illogical but I also realise that when the time comes and I am suspended between the distance of earth and space, there will be no voices of reason. My extreme reaction isn’t something I was born with, like most phobias. It was developed through a few unfortunate incidents, irrevocably scarring me at a time when I was younger and easily impressionable.

The cold and heavy fog had clung to the plane as we sped off, leaving the dreary grey blocks of Glasgow behind. As we ascended, the cool night sky merged into a flurry of colours and I remember becoming increasingly entranced by the changing views below us. It was my first time on an aeroplane and it had been nerve-racking as it had only been a few months since 9/11. Thus when the plane began to plummet violently downwards, the reaction of my fellow passengers was little short of absolute hysteria. The stout, red-faced male beside me pitched sideways in my direction, managing to effectively elbow me in the face. Further along the cabin, an aggressive family of four dressed in vivid colours, clambered to their feet and instantly began demanding explanations. They then all proceeded to careen violently against each other as the plane tilted once more. At this point, blood had been steadily trickling out of my nose and my mother’s belongings had been strewn everywhere as she frantically searched in her bag for a tissue. Later on, the captain apologised for the “mild” turbulence. I understand now that this was basis of my future aversion of flying. Whenever I think back to this time, it is difficult to remember anything other than the stark red staining my clothes, the flailing passengers and the rising levels of suppressed apprehension around me.

However, time moved on, a few years passed, I was twelve and en route to the Middle Eat. The memories from my previous aeroplane experience were fresh in my mind. I was now old enough to understand that there were definitely things to be anxious about. As a result, no amount of self-reasoning could calm my racing heart. The continuous sensation of bobbing in mid-air had me feeling increasingly nauseous. For six hours, I had stayed fixated on the screen map and had silently urged the journey to go faster. Due to this, I was one of the first passengers to realise that we were circling our destination and had been doing so for a full half-hour. Looking quickly out the slit windows I remember seeing a thick mass of white. It was early in the morning and thin shafts of light had pierced and discoloured the swarm of clouds. It looked innocent, as if nothing was amiss. In actual fact, due to a problem in the runway, we stayed hanging in the air for an hour and a half. This was not a serious problem for the majority of passengers but for me, it was agony. The skin across my knuckles had turned white from my fierce clenching. As each minute went by, I grew more and more agitated. I fidgeted, fretted, squirmed and stayed on edge for the duration of the journey. This, as I can now see, was when my actual fear began to develop. Before this point, I was simply apprehensive. However, due to my continued bad luck with planes, illogical panic took over and began to cloud my mind.

Up until this point, my experiences had only been onboard aeroplanes. However, I also experienced another incident after simply setting foot in an airport. Shrill, blaring alarms began to sound and we were immediately ushered outside by grim faced tight lipped airport security. This time, I wasn’t scared as much I was utterly dumbfounded at my unceasing misfortune. Now, at a more mature age, it is easier to conceive why all these problems too place as they are considerably routine with airports. It still however, seems like I was incredibly ill-fated to undergo a different, seemingly life-threating incident every time I travelled. “Seemingly” life-threatening is appropriate in this incident as well as, although some passengers whispered feverishly about “bomb threats”, it was a routine fire alarm check.

From a very young age, I have never been enthusiastic about flying. These incidents have been successful in turning my previous dispassion to fear. One of the most relevant issues is that two incidents happened at a young age. Since then, things will have been unknowingly exaggerated and escalated to fit in with the intense emotions I felt at the time because I was only a child. Now, each of these events has built on each other resulting in my absolute aversion to aeroplanes and even airports. I can say with full confidence that if these events had happened to me at my current age, they would most definitely not have resulted in a phobia. I can also say with certainty that even if I do realise that my current fear of flying is due to insignificant past experience, I would gladly rather endure a fifteen hour car journey to France than a two hour journey by plane.

**Commentary :**

In this essay, there is a clear sense of reflection and self-awareness. The writer’s personality comes across clearly. He recounts three separate air-travel-related incidents which have combined to form his fear of flying. Never all that enthusiastic about flying, he now feels his “dispassion” has become “fear”.

The key features of this piece are the confident expression and straightforward manner in which the incidents are related. The writer’s self-awareness is clear, and there is implicit reflection contained in some of his observations: the exaggerated description of his “fellow passengers” is an implicit recognition of the “illogical” fear he openly refers to at the start of the essay.

Linguistic features are used successfully to create impact: in each episode there are neat touches in the description, eg “the reaction of my fellow passengers was little short of absolute hysteria”, the inverted commas round “mild”; “we stayed hanging in the air for an hour and a half”; “I fidgeted, fretted, squirmed and stayed on edge”; “…after simply setting foot in an airport”.

The introduction is strong on recognising that those with a fear of flying are “generally rational” and that the condition is “illogical” – yet admits that when on a plane there will for sufferers “be no voices of reason”.

The writing is virtually error-free .Vocabulary is well chosen (with occasional lapses such as “suspended between the distance of earth and space”) and a range of sentence structures is used effectively.

Content:

* Clear attention to purpose
* Ideas and feelings explored with a clear sense of reflection and self-awareness
* The writer’s personality comes across clearly

Style:

* Linguistic features used successfully to create impact
* Confident expression
* Clear structure

Cat 2 (top end) : 12/15

**Example 10 ) : Discursive (Persuasive) Body to Die For**

How far would you go to have a ‘beautiful’ body? Would you join a gym? Invest in a padded bra? Set yourself a diet plan? All of these are perfectly safe, justifiable options. Yet still thousands of brain-dead, vain people insist on putting their lives at risk daily by going under the knife, all in the name of, well…beauty. But what defines beauty? These increasingly popular, cosmetically-enhanced celebrities are re-defining the definition of ‘beautiful’ for the new generations. The problem is this ludicrous, disgusting image that balloon-breasted Barbie-doll models are attractive is continuing to brainwash the nation.

The term ‘cosmetic surgery’, or ‘plastic surgery’, which is a more suitable name as plastic is exactly how you look afterwards, is surgery that is not medically essential, but that is desired to ‘improve’ your appearance. Plastic surgery originates from early 800 BC, when surgeons in India restored noses to people who had them taken off as a form of punishment. Modern technology and advanced medicine have made these procedures far more extensive, and dangerous. Recently, the former Miss Argentina, Solange Magnano, died of complications following gluteoplasty, an increasingly popular surgery involving implants being placed into your buttocks to improve their outline and make them firmer. American rap superstar Kanye West also lost his mum after complications with her tummy tuck and breast reduction.

Sadly, stories similar to these are becoming more prevalent as more and more woman opt for quick-fix surgeries rather than exercise to address their body hang-ups. It is dreadfully distressing that the modern world we live in is so ridiculously image obsessed, and we should focus on promoting that character is far more important than appearance. Cosmetic surgery is crushing this vital lesson to life, and sending out the wrong message to us, the naïve public. Plastic surgery is not the self-esteem booster we need, it is merely a plaster patched over a far deeper problem. One that needs to be solved by educating the nation that we should not be judging beauty on the small minority of people who fit this ‘beautiful’ stereotype, or the unrealistic airbrushed photos we see bandaged over the media.

In an attempt to defend this absurd trend, many women are putting it down to a freedom issue. Claiming that for centuries women’s bodies have been ‘owned’ by men, and so cosmetic surgery gives you the ultimate control over your body. I find this somewhat entertaining, as it is the male standards of beauty that are driving women to exaggerate their curves and remain looking young, turning a blind eye to the obvious dangers of the surgery. Today many of the operations are even arranged by male partners rather than the females themselves. Still going to try and disguise cosmetic surgery with the flag of feminism? I don’t think so.

Others will also argue that banning or restricting cosmetic surgery would in turn be restricting freedom of choice. That since we take risks in all surgeries this would be unfair. And yes, of course there are dangers involved in all sorts of surgery. Though sometimes we have to accept these dangers if the medical procedure is absolutely necessary, however plastic surgery is obviously a long way from necessary. And so there is no way to even begin to justify taking these risks, is there?

Another concern is that, if banned, cosmetic surgery would flourish on the black market, as the demand would still exist. If this was the case, procedures would become far more expensive and for that reason would be more popular amongst wealthier people. They would also be carried out by unqualified doctors and out with the safety precautions that the government provides. On the other hand, this argument could be applied to everything illegal, and although this risk does exist, the number of surgeries carried out would still remarkably decrease if the trend was made illegal, because the lack of legal protection would put off most of us. Or so you would hope.

For me, what I find the most concerning aspect of the growing cosmetic surgery industry is how oblivious people are to the safety precautions that are fundamental if you are going to go ahead with such a dangerous surgery. Channel four recently showed a programme – ‘The Ugly Face Of Beauty’ – where Dr Christian Jessen cleverly carried out an investigation into this. He set up a stand on the streets of London advertising a cosmetic surgery company and inviting the public to come in, have a drink, and a consultation, even putting down a deposit for the surgery, and signing any paperwork they were asked to. This, of course, was a fake company, with false paperwork, and unqualified people giving these consultations. It absolutely astonished me that so many women were willing to sign up and pay deposits for surgery without checking if the “surgeon” was even qualified or if the practice was legal. This was a huge eye-opener to them, and also me, and I feel that more television shows like this should be available in an attempt to educate the nation.

That television show alone would be enough to frighten me about the risks of cosmetic surgery. But if that isn’t enough for you, how about a recent report carried out in America stating that liposuction is a bigger killer than car crashes? It reported that there are 20 or more deaths from liposuction for every 100,000 patients and around 16 deaths for every 100,000 victims of car accidents. Frankly, cosmetic surgery is just not worth the risks that accompany it. It is dangerous, damaging and disgusting.

**Commentary:**

 In this essay, the candidate shows clear understanding and engagement, adopting a clear stance an from the outset. There is a confidence and liveliness in the writing and the writer shows persuasive force. Her contempt for those duped into cosmetic surgery is clearly expressed in a range of scathing descriptions (“ludicrous … balloon-breasted Barbie-doll … absurd trend”); at times it seems that she thinks she is only one who has seen through the brainwashing, indicating slight naivity.

The writing is , for the most part, technically accurate – and there is conscious deployment of stylistic devices from the questions at the start to the confident use of alliteration at the end.

Although there is a clear strategy to acknowledge (and them demolish) the counterarguments, some of the thinking is decidedly slack, eg the paragraph at the top of page 2, where the argument is entirely circular. The following paragraph is similarly convoluted. Argument occasionally gives way to sweeping assertion, eg that “many of the operations are even arranged by male partners rather than the females themselves” and in this respect the paucity of sources is perhaps telling. Crucially, perhaps, the candidate fails to acknowledge or consider the “grey area” between what might be considered necessary and unnecessary surgery, and this weakens the impact of the essay.

Content:

* Clear attention to purpose, understanding and engagement
* Evidence of research (careful?)
* Clear, engaged stance

Style:

* Linguistic features are used clearly to persuade and convey thought
* Usually confident expression
* Structure enhances meaning – fairly basic

Mark 10/15 (Cat 2- just)

**Example 11 ) : Discursive (Persuasive) Video Game Violence**

Every day, around 1500 people in the world are murdered. Multiply this figure by 400 and you have the average number of people that sign on every single day to play Call of Duty: Black Ops. 600,000 people play this game every day. The reason these two stats are important is because critics around the world feel that the number of people playing video games like “Black Ops” is having a gigantic effect on how many murders are being committed. This video game incudes scenes where in games characters have their necks cut open, scenes where players are mowed down from helicopter mounted machine guns and scenes where people are savagely attacked by dogs. Critics feel that people should not be exposing themselves to this type of content. They think that when people play a video game like this, an unstoppable and irreversible mind set will overtake them and they will go out into the public and slay down every living thing in sight. Now, you have o ask yourself, if this many people can expose themselves to three types of scenes daily and not imitate them in the real world, what is the problem? As far as evidence goes, there isn’t one.

The idea that a person needs to repeat the act of killing someone in a video game in the real world is simplistic. If millions of people can subject themselves to this type of content day in and day out without any repercussions, then this shows that there is no manipulating power behind video games. Psychologists have tried to find links between video game violence and real world violence but at best they have come away with finding a very casual link between playing these games and signs of anti-social behaviour, aggression and hostility. Not murderous violence. The other flaw in these “studies” is that the people doing the research appear to be making what they want to happen too obvious. If someone asked you to play a violent game then partake in an activity afterwards that could be seen as monitoring your mood, would you not catch on to what they were trying to do and oblige in providing the kind of #”effects” they want to see? Even subconsciously?

Another fact is that before video games there was still violence and there were most definitely still murders. The people that are looking down and giving their criticisms on video games do not have evidence to back up that they are making any kind of impact and more importantly, they don’t have real experience of playing these video games. If you want the evidence, the hard facts, why not just ask the more experienced side. If you were going to buy a car, you would listen to a car salesman, not a baker. The same rule should be applied to the ever more popular gaming scene. Why aren’t we talking to the professionals, the gamers? What would they say?

The main question is that people who frown upon violent games ask is, ‘Why does it need to be violent?’ What is so attractive about causing harm to someone or something in a virtual world? Why are so many normal people fascinated with being in control of causing devastation and committing absurd acts? Now, the main type of people that play violent video games are typically young adult males. Traditionally, the “hunters” in previous time eras would also have been young adult males. It is almost expected, it’s what young adult males crave and want. They want to reap a sense of achievement and masculinity, and for the first time since the human race began, they can fulfil these almost primeval urges and reap these rewards from the comfort and safety of their own home. Gaming certainly doesn’t provoke violence; it seems it could actually be preventing it.

Another question that people ask is why people need to be in control of the video game? Why can’t they just watch an action film or listen to some aggressive music. The answer to this is that it’s not repetitive,. The player is free to do whatever they want. They can change the outcome and storyline of the game. Each time a gamer sits down, they don’t know what is going to happen, and in a world where a majority of people become very bored, very fast, this is an excellent trait of these games. Another point which is incredibly attractive to people is the gift of power in these games. You are never given the place of a mediocre, untalented or unimportant character. You are always in control of a brilliant character that has skills and talent required to carry out any tasks or missions that are asked of him. When players are given this role, they feel responsible and respected. These are the types of feeling that people should be looking at. Why focus on the negatives when there are so many more positives!

The main worry proposed by the community of snooty critics is that if we let children play these games, they will then drop their Barbie dolls and Action men and equip submachine guns and rocket launchers, causing riots and mayhem. Again, if they cared to check up on evidence and statistics, they would see that this is an impossibility as the main gaming community consists of mainly males, aged between 17 and 35. If you can drive, get married and potentially raise a family, I would say that this group can be trusted with being able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality and fight against the overwhelming urge to go out into public and open fire on innocent civilians. If we can trust these responsible members of society with violent films and music, why aren’t we accepting violent video games!

Not only does the above statistic rule out the irrational fear that many critics seem to possess that is young children will be running riot with rockets and rifles, but it also dampens the idea that more murders are being committed by gamers. As mentioned before, the typical age/gender of gamers is male and between the years of 17 and 35. This number also corresponds with the description of the type of people who are most likely to commit murders. I am not hinting that there is a link between video game violence and real world violence. I am saying that if this many gamers are staying inside and dedicating a colossal amount of time to this new social taboo., surely they are avoiding other darker and dangerous scenes that include and accept things like drink, drugs and violence.

All in all, violence is more deeply seated and complex than these video game critics appear to be portraying it as. It is not a road that stable and normal people take without overwhelming provocation. Humans are also more complex than the critics are making us out to be. We are not robots or sponges, for the most part; we can define right from wrong. We are responsible enough to play video games and it’s just unfortunate that there are sometimes a handful of people who ruin our reputation, and an even larger battalion who are too narrow minded to accept that.

**Commentary:**

The essay shows adequate understanding of the issue of video gaming violence/real violence and is a reasonably straightforward defence of video gaming.

The writer ridicules the allegation that there is a causal/casual\* relationship between violence in games and violence in real life and goes on to question the methods of those who set out to prove its existence. There follows a more general defence of video games and their empowerment of players as opposed to the passivity of watching films. He concludes with the reasonable notion that violence is “more deeply seated and complex” than critics of video games seem to think.

The arguments are mostly sensible and sometimes quite insightful – eg the possibility that violence in video games is an outlet and hence reduces violence in the real world. His criticism of psychologists’ testing methods, however, seriously underestimates the rigour with which academic studies are normally conducted. There is also the issue of lack of sources – certainly not ‘careful research and selection’ (Cat. 2). Marking is holistic and so one area will not bring the mark down into Cat 3 by itself, but, on balance, with other ‘adequate’ rather than ‘clear’ elements, the essay ends up at the top end of Cat. 3

Content:

* Adequate attention to purpose
* Adequate understanding
* Evidence of research
* Clear stance - clear engaged stance (Cat 2)

Style:

* Linguistic features used adequately (in places clearly)to argue etc
* Adequate expression and structure

Cat 3 (top end) : 9/15