

VATE 2013 English Language Sample Examination Paper
Section B - Analytical commentary: sample analysis

Text 2: Question 6

NB: This sample commentary is a detailed analysis which highlights the range of language features which may be discussed. Student responses will reflect exam conditions and time limits.

This text is part of the Victoria Police's online recruitment campaign to encourage interested individuals to apply for the new role of Protective Services Officer (PSO). The primary purpose of this extract is to inform prospective PSOs about what is expected of them and their behaviour as a member of the Victoria Police, and more practically about what the job of a PSO entails on a day-to-day basis. Another function of this text is persuasive, to 'sell' the benefits of a career with Victoria Police as a PSO and encourage those interested to apply. The register is formal and the tone is authoritative, both appropriate to the context and purpose of the text, its focus on the Victoria Police, and on the role of Protective Services Officer.

The opening lines of Text 2 (lns 3-5) present an appealing image of employment with Victoria Police, encouraging potential employees with the use of lexemes with positive connotations, such as 'challenging and rewarding', 'serving' and 'entrusted'. However, this opening paragraph (lns 5-10) also introduces the main theme of the first section of the text, 'Working with Victoria Police'; that is, an outline of the expectations for behaviour and the serious consequences of any breaches of these strict protocols. Therefore, the tone in this first section quickly becomes official and legalistic. The second section of this text (lines 33-58) marks another shift in the focus of the discourse, to a description of the role of a PSO and what to expect on a typical shift. The register, however, remains formal. The final lines of the text (lines 59-64) return to the more positive theme of the opening lines, thereby framing the text. The tone becomes more friendly and the register more personal as the purpose here is clearly to encourage people to consider a police career and to apply for the role of PSO. There is the notable use of the subject pronoun 'we' and the possessive pronoun 'our' to personalise the Victoria Police. The choice of verb phrases here is important in portraying the Victoria Police in a more positive light: 'We work hard' (ln 60); 'we strive' and 'we aim to ensure' (lns 61-62); 'we look forward to' (ln 64). The repetition of the word 'value', as a verb (ln 59) and as an adjective (ln 63), supports the persuasive purpose of this text, underlining the benefits of pursuing a career with the Victoria Police.

Overall, the lexicon in this text is formal and standard, and this helps to create a distinctly strong and authoritative voice throughout the discourse. Examples of more formal words and expressions include: 'entrusted' (ln 5), 'should avail themselves' (ln 28), 'accountably' (ln 6), 'whilst' (ln 11), 'practicable' (ln 57), 'scrutinised' (ln 27). The effect of this formal lexicon is to reinforce the Victoria Police as a body of authority and to maintain a sense of social distance between it and the general public. It also requires some inference on the part of the reader to fully understand the meaning and implication of terms such as 'integrity related policies' (ln 18), and 'inappropriate associations or perceptions of conflicts of interest' (lns 32). The use of the expressions 'team mates' (ln 40) and the idiomatic 'keep an eye out for' (ln 41)

are less formal but still appropriate to the context. The use of the lexeme ‘mates’ emphasises camaraderie, and is a familiar Australian term, often used in other sectors, such as AFL and the Defence Forces.

The lexicon in Text 2 is also characterised by the notable use of jargon and this also reinforces the formal register. The text uses jargon relevant to policing: ‘Victoria Police Academy’ (ln 34), ‘deployed’ (ln 37), ‘operational equipment’ (ln 53). It also uses terminology typical of employment conditions: ‘the application process’ (ln 20), ‘your leave requirements’ (ln 56), ‘comprehensive training and support’ (lns 60-61), ‘healthy work life balance’ (ln 62). There is also, particularly in the first section of the text, the use of a legal register as the focus here is on highlighting, without ambiguity, the expected and prescribed behaviour of Victoria Police employees, as dictated in various official documents, for example, ‘The Police Regulation Act imposes a duty on all employees, not only whilst on duty but at all other times to respond to incidents and be of good behaviour’ (lns 11-12). The formal, legal register of the first section of this text is reinforced also by the repetition of key expressions, and the listing of near-synonyms, both of which add detail and precision to the text, ensuring there is no potential for misunderstanding on these important legal points. The expression ‘be subject to’ is variously repeated (lns 7, 14, 21) as is the phrase ‘on and off duty’ (lns 11-12, 15, 22, 23). This repetition adds to cohesion and therefore coherence in the text. The listing of near-synonyms in lines 6-7, ‘professionally, fairly, accountably and with the highest level of integrity’ also emphasises the importance of the PSO role, with its ‘considerable authority and responsibility’ (ln 5).

Text 2’s formal and authoritative tone is also supported by the notable use of modal verbs throughout the discourse, for example, ‘should’ (ln 17), ‘will’ (ln 52), ‘may’ (ln 13), ‘must’ (ln 16), ‘would’ (ln 27). The use of these modals contributes to the legal register of the first section of the text, creating a sense of precision by covering all possible scenarios, and setting the expectations and protocols for behaviour, ‘you will be subject to testing for drugs and alcohol’ (ln 21). While imperative sentences are never used, the repetition of the subject pronoun ‘you’ with the modal verbs creates a commanding tone throughout the text: ‘You will build and maintain rapport with commuters’ (lns 45-46). This parallelism is particularly evident in the second section, ‘Life as a PSO’ where the repetition of the construction ‘you will’ invites readers to imagine themselves in the role. As well as the use of the personal pronouns ‘you’ and ‘your’, the audience is addressed as ‘prospective’, ‘potential’ and ‘Victoria Police’ employees which maintains a sense of social distance, and again heightens the sense of authority of the Police management.

Declarative sentences are the only sentence type in Text 2 and this supports the primary purpose of the text which is to inform prospective employees about working for Victoria Police and about the PSO role. The sentence structures, in contrast, range from simple (ln 15), compound (lns 16-17), complex (lns 17-19), and compound-complex (lns 38-39). The range of sentence structures adds detail and complexity to the language, supporting the informative purpose, reinforcing the authority of the Police, and emphasising the seriousness of the issues being discussed. The use of listing also adds to the density of the text as well as offering clarity, helping to avoid ambiguity by covering all possible scenarios (lns 47-49). This also adds to the legal register which characterises the discourse.

The formal register and the impersonal tone are also created through the use of the passive and nominalisations. Agentless passives are used where it is clear who the agent is, for example, the Victoria Police: 'if their conduct were to be scrutinised' (lns 26-27). In many cases, the passive is used to shift the emphasis to whatever is important in that sentence or clause, creating front-focus: 'Transportation will be provided for you...' (ln 42). Often, the use of the passive shifts the focus on to the prospective PSO: 'You will be provided with facilities to compile paperwork, which is minimal' (lns 49-50). Here again, the use of the passive assists with information flow, highlighting the positive, 'the provision of facilities', while the more negative aspects, 'the paperwork' are downplayed. Nominalisations add complexity, and therefore, formality to the language, for example: 'to making application' (ln 30 – rather than 'applying'), 'will give potential employees an understanding' (lns 30-31 – rather than 'help potential employees understand'), and 'imposes a duty' (ln 11 – rather than 'requires').

Overall, this is a well-planned, detailed, and cohesive text. As well as the use of standard grammar and lexicon, cohesion is supported by the repetition of key words and syntactic structures, by conjunctions, and by substitution. Anaphoric referencing is evident in the following examples: 'this' (ln 9) refers back to 'you will be subject to...' (lns 7-8); 'these' (ln 24) replaces 'prescribed medications' (ln 24); and 'it' (ln 27) is a substitute for 'their conduct' (lns 26-27). Cohesion is also supported by the use of synonyms which avoid unnecessary repetition, for example: 'conduct' (ln 15) and 'behaviour' (ln 16); 'expected standards' (ln 8) and 'required standard' (ln 19). The text's cohesion and logical ordering both contribute to coherence in this discourse which in turn supports both the informative and the persuasive purposes of Text 2.