



Victorian Association for  
the Teaching of English

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Written examination sample paper**

**Suggested responses**

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1/134-136 Cambridge Street, Collingwood, VIC, 3066

## **SECTION A: Short-answer questions**

### **Questions 1–5 Sample answers**

**NB: These are a guide only to the scope of answers students may provide.**

#### **Sample answer for Question 1**

What is the purpose of this conversation and how is this supported by the register? Provide examples of language features from at least **two** subsystems.

*3 marks*

- a) The primary purpose of this conversation is social and therefore the register is appropriately informal. Julia Gillard is having a casual, social conversation with Jesse Williams about his experiences as a footballer in America and updating him with details of the extreme weather typical of Australian summers. It is important to note, however, that the participants are essentially strangers; they obviously don't know each other as friends. Therefore, while the register is informal and the tone is personal, there is a certain awkwardness to this conversation because it's contrived. This can be seen in the way that Julia introduces herself as 'Julia Gillard' (ln 1), not simply Julia, as you would with a friend; but also not as the 'Prime Minister' as one might expect in a more formal setting;
- b) A secondary purpose, given that this Skype was made available to the public via various social media outlets, is also political – it gives Julia the opportunity to present to the public an alternate side to herself (other than her purely political persona). It personalises/humanises her, showing her to be friendly, warm, able to have a laugh, able to converse about everyday topics that connect her with the general public, like sport, the weather, food, etc;
- c) The informal register, which supports the text's purposes, can be seen in the syntactic choices. The sentences, especially Jesse's (lns 66-71), tend to be very long compound or complex and very fragmented, interspersed with pauses (lns 29-33), discourse particles ('um', 'ah', 'yeah-nah', 'y'know') and repetition (ln 54), false start (ln 7), etc. There is also ellipsis which supports the informal register (ln 78 – missing subject pronoun 'I'; also lns 5-6 and 8);
- d) While Julia's lexicon is mostly standard, Jesse's adds to the informality – this is evident in his opening line ('Hey, how ya doin-' ln 2) and in his constant use of 'yeah-nah', 'n- stuff', 'y'know' and in the colloquial 'No worries' (ln 78). Julia's use of Jesse's first name is also important in establishing the friendly, casual tone of their conversation. In contrast, Jesse avoids using Julia's name at all, perhaps because he's unsure of whether to say 'Julia', 'Ms Gillard' or 'Prime Minister';
- e) The informality is also created by the non-standard pronunciation of certain words, for example: Julia: 'yer' (ln 35) 'ya' (ln 36); and Jesse: 'doin-' (ln 2); 'ya' (ln 81), 'yep' (ln 9) and 'yeah' (ln 37). Elision is also present - 'coupla' (ln 70) - typical in more informal spoken language.

**Sample answer for Question 2**

Comment on Jesse's use of the expression 'yeah-nah' in lines 13 and 29. What is the function of this expression in this discourse?

*2 marks*

- a) 'Yeah-nah' is a discourse particle and Jesse uses this expression three times in his conversation with Julia Gillard in lines 13 and 29, and also in line 46;
- b) Lines 13 and 29 – Jesse's use of 'yeah-nah' in these instances downplays the direct focus on himself which occurs in line 13 after Julia's overt praise of his recent performance and championship win and in line 29 after her query about his nervousness about his plans for the future. The need to dilute this focus on himself may stem from his own modesty or may be related to the Australian 'tall poppy syndrome'; the desire not to be seen to be 'big noting oneself'.

(In contrast, the use of 'yeah-nah' in line 46 is a bit clearer; it allows Jesse to agree with Julia about the lack of vegemite and then reinforce the negative in his statement which follows, which is that vegemite cannot be bought in the US town where he lives.)

**Sample answer for Question 3**

Who controls the topic in this conversation? Discuss **two** conversational features and/or strategies that enable this control to be achieved. Provide examples with line numbers to support your answer.

*3 marks*

- a) Julia Gillard controls the topic in this conversation; although both she and Jesse share the floor for equal amounts of time;
- b) Julia initiates the conversation with Jesse (ln 1) and also signals the end of their chat (ln 75), using familiar, formulaic openings and closings (adjacency pairs). Jesse understands these familiar cues from Julia and responds in a conventional way to both engage in conversation and also to conclude their chat;
- c) The use of interrogatives is important to Julia's management of the topic in this conversation. In contrast, Jesse doesn't ask any questions of Julia as this is not his role in this conversation. Julia introduces a new topic or develops a particular topic by questioning Jesse and prompting him to respond: lns 3-4; lns 16-17; ln 28; ln 36; ln 40; ln 48. Julia also takes responsibility for keeping the conversation going by rephrasing or expanding a question, especially if Jesse hesitates or flounders in his response, eg. lns 36-40; lns 48-50;
- d) In lns 10, 60 and 75 Julia uses the discourse particle 'Well' to signal to Jesse that she is taking the floor and then she initiates a shift in topic;
- e) Julia often follows up Jesse's statements with an evaluation: lns 25, 34, 59. These serve as a device to indicate that these topics are now over and a new one is introduced by Julia, showing her again to be the more powerful interlocutor in the discourse.

**Sample answer for Question 4**

Comment on the non-fluency features in Jesse's speech between lines 51-58. What do they signal about the nature of informal spoken language? Provide examples and line numbers in your response.

*3 marks*

- a) Nature of informal spoken language: while Julia Gillard maybe/probably has some prepared questions to ask Jesse, this is largely an unscripted conversation, between participants who are relatively unknown to each other. Jesse is possibly less 'prepared' than Julia, not only because she controls the discussion, but also because she has obviously had more experience, as a politician, in public speaking and speaking 'impromptu'. Therefore, there are non-fluency features because this is a spontaneous conversation where the participants think and speak 'on their feet'. This is also a conversation via Skype – so while you can see the other's face, you are probably more likely to miss some of the usual paralinguistic cues when conversing in the same room;
- b) Repetition: 'yeah, yeah' (ln 51), 'it's, it's, ah, it's' (lns 51 and 54), 'a, a' (ln 57);
- c) Pause: at end ln 52. This is probably Jesse looking for Julia to take back the floor. When she doesn't, he continues on and hesitates and repeats himself even more as he attempts to maintain the topic, even though he doesn't have much to say – he is not in a position in this conversation to change the topic by asking a question of Julia;
- d) Discourse particles: 'ah', 'um', 'y'know'. These either fill pauses or signal hesitation as Jesse is trying to work out what to say next;
- e) 'n- stuff like that' (ln 52) is used a lot by Jesse throughout the conversation and also acts as a 'filler' as it does here, as he works out what next to say;
- f) These are 'non-fluency' features because they interrupt the flow of Jesse's speech and produce that fragmented sentence structure that is often typical of informal speech.

**Sample answer for Question 5**

How does Julia meet Jesse's positive face needs through her language choices? Provide **three** different examples.

*4 marks*

- a) Julia's purpose in this conversation is to build rapport with Jesse so she strives, through her language choices, to meet his positive face needs: the need to be liked, respected and included;
- b) She congratulates and praises Jesse (lns 10-12; 75-77);
- c) Repetition: in lines 6 and 8 Julia repeats/echoes Jesse's own words and, in doing so, affirms his experience/opinion and shows empathy;
- d) There's a pattern in Julia's speech of concluding Jesse's turn with an expression of support for what he has just said, for example, 'That's fantastic' (lns 25 and 34); 'Right, right' (ln 47); 'that's good, that's good' (ln 59);

- e) Julia laughs at Jesse's jokes/attempts at humour (lns 38 and 47);
- f) Julia also establishes a rapport with Jesse, and makes him feel 'included', by engaging him in conversation about familiar topics and referencing a shared understanding of Australian identity. Familiar Australian terms like 'vegemite' (ln 45), 'bushfire' (ln 63), and 'beach' (ln 71), help connect Jesse with his home country/culture, despite living in America.

**End of Section A sample answers**

## **SECTION B: Analytical commentary**

### **Sample answer for Question 6**

The following is a comprehensive list which highlights the range of language features that may be discussed in an analytical commentary on Text 2.

Student responses will reflect exam conditions and time limits.

#### **Setting the scene: social purpose, register, contextual factors**

1. This text is from the website of the Victoria Police and is all about employment with the Victoria Police, particularly, in the relatively new role of Protective Services Officers;
2. The Victoria Police represents power and authority, law and order, discipline and punishment, and therefore this text employs an appropriately formal register and standard language to actively construct, promote, and reflect this image of the Victorian police force amongst the wider community via the internet;
3. At times, particularly in Section 1 (lns 2-32) where there are certain legal points that need to be made, the register is also ‘frozen’, as well as formal;
4. This text has several functions. The primary purpose of this text is to inform, both the community and interested individuals – about what is required of an employee of Victoria Police, and specifically about what is involved day-to-day in the role of PSO – including also the high expectations and limitations on one’s behaviour and private life, etc. This might seem, at times, somewhat at odds with the secondary purpose of the text which is persuasive, to promote a career with the Victoria Police, and specifically to encourage those interested to apply for the role of PSO;
5. What is characteristic throughout this text is a strong authoritative voice; one could imagine, much like that of a police supervisor or manager.

#### **Some stylistic and discourse features of the text that could be discussed in analysis.**

##### **Discourse structure**

1. The opening lines of this text (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’, ‘entrusted’, ‘considerable authority and responsibility’;
2. The tone and register of the next section of the text (lns 6-32) changes and becomes more official and legalistic as the focus shifts to an outline of the expectations for behaviour and the serious consequences of any breaches of these strict protocols;
3. The second part of this text ‘Life as a PSO’ (lines 34-58) 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, but the register remains formal;

4. The final lines of the text (lines 59-64) again mark a change in the discourse, returning to the more positive theme of the opening lines, thus 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 positively: '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.

### Lexicon

1. Formal and standard lexicon. Examples of more formal words and expressions include: 'entrusted' (ln 5), 'accountably' (ln 6), 'prescribe' (ln 8), 'whilst' (ln 11), 'scrutinised' (ln 27), 'should avail themselves' (ln 28), 'rapport' (ln 46), 'compile' (ln 50), 'amenities' (ln 51), 'practicable' (ln 57), etc. 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 purpose of this second section of the text. The use of the word 'mates' (as opposed to team members) emphasises camaraderie, and is a familiar Australian term, used often in other sectors like the Defence Forces;
2. Jargon relevant to Victoria Police: 'on and off duty' (various lns), 'Victoria Police Academy' (ln 34), 'deployed' (ln 37), 'equip yourself for duty' (ln 39), 'supervising Sergeant' (ln 40), 'patrol' (ln 47), 'operational equipment' (ln 53); and terminology related to employment conditions: 'the application process' (lns 10, 20), 'mentoring program' (ln 36), 'meal break' (ln 51), 'your leave requirements' (ln 56), 'comprehensive training and support' (lns 60-61), 'healthy work life balance' (ln 62). The use of this jargon, as well as the formal language, reinforces the authority and expertise of the Victoria Police, and also requires some inference on the part of audience to fully understand the meaning and implications of expressions such as: 'integrity related policies' (ln 18), 'organisational and public expectations' (lns 27-28), 'inappropriate associations or perceptions of conflicts of interest' (ln 32);
3. This is also highlighted by the use of legal jargon, particularly in section one, including references to legal documents: 'Police Regulation Act' (ln 11), 'Victoria Police Code of Conduct - Professional & Ethical Standards' (lns 17-18); and other legal terminology, 'legislation and policy requirements' (ln 7), 'criminal or internal discipline proceedings' (ln 14);
4. Repetition of key words for emphasis: 'duty' (lns 11, 12, 24, 'both on and off duty' ln 15, 23, 'whilst on or available for duty' ln 22, 'conduct' (lns 15, 17, 26, 27, 29, 30); 'maintain' (lns 45, 46). Also, repetition of near-synonyms which is typical of legal texts for precision and to avoid any ambiguity: 'use this authority professionally, fairly, accountably' (ln 6), 'avail themselves of and be familiar with' (lns 28-29);

- ‘free of...drugs at all times, both on and off duty’ (ln 23);
5. Modals: ‘should’ (lns 17, 26, 28), ‘will’ (various lns), ‘may’ (lns 13, 31), ‘must’ (ln 16), ‘would’ (ln 27). The effect of these is to: cover all possible scenarios; create a sense of precision and in some cases the ‘absolute’, eg. ‘you will be a valued member...’ (ln 63) ; emphasise the voice of authority, setting the expectations and protocols for behaviour, ‘you will be subject to testing for drugs and alcohol’ (ln 21). In this way, the use of modals also contributes to the legal register which characterises section one of the text;
  6. Personal pronouns: use of ‘you’, ‘your’ to address the intended audience, those interested in finding out more and applying to become a PSO. Although imperative sentences are never used, the repetition of the ‘you’ with the modals creates a ‘commanding’ tone throughout the text, ‘You will build and maintain rapport with commuters’ (lns 45-46). The audience is also often addressed in the text as ‘prospective’, ‘potential’ and ‘Victoria Police’ employees which maintains a sense of social distance, and heightens the sense of authority of the Police management;
  7. Modifiers: use of adjectives and adverbs to create phrases to qualify ideas or emphasise certain aspects, eg. ‘proactively patrol’ (ln 47), ‘great organisation’ (ln 64), ‘comprehensive training’ (ln 60). These phrases, in conjunction with the syntactic features, also add a lot more detail and precision to the text, ensuring there is no misunderstanding, and therefore, also reinforcing the text’s formal and authoritative tone.

## Syntax

1. Sentence type: all declaratives which support the primary purpose of the text, to inform prospective employees about working for Victoria Police and about the role of a PSO;
2. Sentence structures: a range of sentence structures, including simple (ln 15); compound (lns 16-17); complex (lns 17-19); compound-complex (lns 38-39). The range of sentence structures adds detail, density and complexity to the language, supporting the informative purpose, reinforcing the authority of the Victoria Police, and emphasising the seriousness of the issues being discussed;
3. Listing: ‘any safety concerns, events in the area and things to keep an eye out for’ (ln 41); ‘You will proactively patrol the train platform, car parks and surrounds, dealing with anti-social behaviour, property damage, alcohol and transport related offences as they arise’ (lns 47-49). Listing adds detail and clarity, covers all possible scenarios, avoids ambiguity;
4. Parallelism: repetition of key syntactic structures in section one, ‘you will be subject to’ (lns 7, 21); ‘You will be/are required to’ (lns 21, 22), supporting the focus on prescribed standards of behaviour. Between lines 34-58, there is the repetition of the construction ‘You will...’ which supports the focus on the ‘Life as a PSO’, inviting readers to imagine themselves in the role;
5. The use of the passive also emphasises the impersonal, formal tone of the text. The agentless passive, in particular, is often used where it is clear who the agent is



(the Victoria Police): ‘if their conduct were to be scrutinised’ (lns 26-27). In many cases, the use of the passive shifts the focus on to the prospective police employee/PSO: ‘You will be provided with facilities...’ (lns 49-50). In other cases, the use of the passive shifts the emphasis to whatever is important in that sentence/clause, creating front focus, eg. ‘Transportation will be provided for you...’ (ln 42); ‘Actions committed during your personal time...’ (ln 13);

6. Nominalisations also add a level of complexity, and therefore, formality to the language: ‘to making application’ (ln 30) (rather than ‘applying’); ‘will give potential employees an understanding’ (lns 30-31) (rather than ‘help potential employees understand’); ‘imposes a duty on all employees’ (ln 11) (rather than ‘requires’); ‘be of good behaviour’ (ln 12).

### **Discourse — coherence and cohesion**

1. **Cohesion:** this is an edited, well-planned, and very cohesive text. As well as standard grammar and language, use of repetition, substitution, and conjunctions, the following also contribute to cohesion in the text:
  - Information flow, especially in section two where the more unpleasant or even dangerous aspects of the PSO role are deliberately downplayed or avoided. This can be seen in lines 47-49 – the front focus is on the more positive ‘You will proactively patrol the train platform, car parks and surrounds’, followed by a relative clause listing the more negative ‘anti-social behaviour, property damage, alcohol and transport related offences’ but deliberately avoiding how to deal with these. Similarly, the sentence, ‘You will be provided with facilities to compile paperwork, which is minimal’ (lns 49-50), also downplays a potentially unpleasant part of the job. Good aspects of the job are often foregrounded as their own sentence: ‘You will always be on duty with at least one other PSO’ (ln 43);
  - Synonyms: as well as listing of near-synonyms, use of other synonyms such as ‘conduct’ (ln 15) and ‘behaviour’ (ln 16); ‘expected standard’ (ln 8) and ‘required standard’ (ln 19);
  - Anaphoric referencing: ‘this’ (ln 9) refers back to lines 7-8 ‘you will be subject to...’; ‘these’ (ln 24) refers back to ‘prescribed medications’ (ln 24); ‘it’ (ln 27) refers back to ‘their conduct’ (lns 26-27).
2. **Coherence:** the text’s cohesion and logical ordering, as previously discussed, both contribute to this text’s coherence - the text is very cohesive, precise and detailed.

## **End of Section B Sample answers**

**SECTION C: Essay — general advice****Sample answer for Essay 1: Question 7**

Words are central to our experience of ceremony and ritual, in our personal lives and in the public domain. Discuss the language we use to celebrate and commemorate. Refer to at least **two** subsystems of language in your response.

- a) Ceremony and ritual are very important in both our personal lives and in the wider community, from a local up to a national level. While the visual spectacle is important (the clothing, symbols, decorations, setting [eg. Parliament House], etc), the language is equally/if not more important to our experience of the ceremony or ritual – the words (often highly conventionalised, and often carefully scripted by ourselves or by professional speechwriters) frame the event, by naming the details and the emotions involved, and in doing so, provide an important record of the occasion of significance. Students need to highlight and explain how the choice of words (with all their connotations) and the structure of the discourse are both crucial in determining our experience of the ceremony or ritual;
- b) Students need to recognise the importance of context here in determining our choice of register: both the situational and the cultural contexts in which the ceremony takes place. The language used depends on: the purpose; the audience; the setting, especially how private or public the event is; and, of course, what the ritual is about; as well as the values, attitudes and beliefs of those present or participating;
- c) An important linguistic feature of the register we use on occasions of ceremony or ritual is those familiar, formulaic expressions which we learn how/when to use from an early age, for example: ‘Happy Birthday’, ‘Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to...’, ‘Cheers’, ‘I do’. While they can sometimes sound ‘hollow’ or unoriginal, these conventional expressions can help ‘signpost’ or structure the ceremony, fill a gap or awkward silence when we struggle to articulate ourselves, provide comfort or reassurance through their familiarity;
- d) Our language can be very standard and formal, especially when it is a very tragic and sombre occasion; or when it is a ceremony of very significant political, social or historical significance; or when it is a very public event and the words used need to be accessible to a broad range of people. Students need to discuss examples of such language and also provide some insight into why this formal register is more appropriate here, eg. to use less formal or less standard language in these circumstances, would be seen by many to be in poor taste; to be minimising the impact or significance; or worse, to be causing offence by not showing adequate enough respect through the language chosen.
- e) Students, however, should also consider the more informal language we choose to use and why, for example, when the ceremony or ritual is a happy one, in less formal or more personal settings (such as home), and when the audience includes family and friends, people who know us well, on a personal level. We can use ‘in-jokes’ or ‘in-expressions’; nicknames; swearing and slang; other features of informal, conversational language. On these occasions, whether they be celebrations or

even commemorations (family funeral), the choice of a more informal register is often more appropriate and better at building rapport and creating meaning for the participants.

### **Sample answer for Essay 2: Question 8**

Our language choices can have a powerful impact on others. How do we construct our language to promote social harmony and build rapport with others? Refer to at least **two** subsystems of language in your response.

- a) From an early age, we develop an awareness of how our language impacts on those around us. Even as young children, we learn how to manipulate our language in order to get what we want, or to express our emotions, etc. Hopefully, as we mature, so does our appreciation for how our use of language, both as individuals and as a society, impacts on others, sometimes negatively, but also positively. Our language choices play an important role in helping us connect with others, in order to build personal relationships, but also in order for society to function in a constructive and peaceful way;
- b) How we use language to promote social harmony and build rapport relies on our awareness of the role of language in meeting others' positive face needs and negative face needs;
- c) Students need to discuss both the language we DON'T use and the language we DO use in our social interactions;
- d) An important aspect of the discussion in this essay is our awareness of the context in which we are communicating and how we try to tailor our language so that it is appropriate to the audience or participants;
- e) This can include trying to avoid language that will offend, upset, exclude, intimidate, put down others, eg. discriminatory language, taboo language (swearing), dysphemisms, language that deliberately obfuscates (jargon, language dense with embedded phrases/clauses, nominalisations, doublespeak);
- f) This can also include using language that softens, includes, soothes, illuminates, eg. euphemisms, interrogatives (rather than imperatives), politeness markers, inclusive terms of address (sometimes more formal to show respect; other times more personal to include), politically correct language, plain English;
- g) Subsystems could include phonology/phonetics (use of volume, for example); morphology and lexicology; syntax (especially important here is the impact of different sentence types, eg. use of imperative); semantics (an understanding of the different connotations of words and expressions and the impact that these can have in certain contexts, depending on audience, etc).

### **Sample answer for Essay 3: Question 9**

Should we fear language change or embrace it? Discuss with reference to contemporary Australian English and refer to at least **two** subsystems of language in your response.

- a) This essay topic presupposes students' awareness of the inevitability of change in language, including our Australian variety of English. The forces promoting change in Australian English include: globalisation (our increasing exposure, thanks to technology, to other countries/cultures and their varieties of English); technological development and innovation; multiculturalism; changes in social values and mores (which has seen, for example, the more frequent use of swearing on TV, in media), events of social and

historical significance (Black Saturday bushfires; 9/11 and terrorism, etc) – students need to show some understanding of these in their discussion and provide some linguistic evidence from a range of subsystems to support their comments. For example: changes to spelling, lack of or misuse of punctuation, neologisms, borrowings, loss of words/expressions or substitution by another (often from American English), changes to meaning and connotations over time, use of emoticons and digits, internet-speak ('om nom nom'), etc;

- b) The core issue posed by this essay question, however, is about social attitudes towards language change, and in particular, to how our own national variety of English is evolving and developing here in Australia. The traditional divide in attitudes is between prescriptivists (those who fear language change and see it as all about loss, in particular, of standards in language) and, on the other hand, descriptivists (those who embrace the concept of language change because, at the very least, they accept it as inevitable and necessary for effective communication, but also because they see it as enriching our language, not diminishing it). The stimulus material provided also shows how many of us sit in the 'middle-ground' between prescriptivism and descriptivism, our attitudes towards language change varying according to context, experience, etc;
- c) Students need to explore concrete examples of language, from a range of subsystems. They can do this by highlighting and discussing some of the specific changes in Australian English that most concern prescriptivists as a sign of declining standards of language (see above) – while at the same time presenting the alternate view in relation to these, that of descriptivists.

## END OF SAMPLE ANSWER BOOK



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