

# English Language

Answers and commentaries  
**GCSE (8700)**

**Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing  
(from 2026)**

Marked answers to exemplify the updated questions for first exam in 2026. Supporting commentary is provided to help you understand how marks are awarded and how students can improve performance.

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## Answers and commentaries

Please note that these responses have been produced by a senior examiner and are not from an exam series, therefore they have not been through the usual exam standardisation process. This resource is intended to illustrate possible student answers and generate discussion rather than to indicate a standard for a future exam. As they have been created to represent a student responding in exam conditions, some errors in spelling and punctuation are present.

This resource is to be used alongside the [GCSE English Language updated Sample assessment materials for first exam in 2026](#) Paper 1 Question paper and inserts.

### Question 1

This question covers AO1 'Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas'. Now a multiple-choice question (MCQ), learners need to read the given lines and answer the four questions.

#### Question

Read again the first part of the source, from **lines 1 to 9**.

Answer **all** parts of this question.

- Shade the **circles** in the boxes of the one that you think is **correct**.
- Choose a maximum of **one** answer for each question.
- If you make an error cross out the **whole box**.
- If you change your mind and require a statement that has been crossed out then draw a circle around the box.

[4 marks]

#### Mark scheme

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas</li><li>• Select and synthesise evidence from different texts</li></ul>	
<b>This assesses bullet point 1: identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Mark</b>
What worries Pi about the hyena?	Remembering what his father told him about hyenas	1
How do hyenas usually attack?	As a group	1
What sort of attackers are hyenas?	Tough	1
What does Pi hope will distract the hyena away from him?	The other animals on the boat	1

## Student responses

### Response A

0 1 . 1 What worries Pi about the hyena?

Its appearance

Remembering what his father told him about hyenas

The noise it is making

0 1 . 2 How do hyenas usually attack?

On their own

In a pair

As a group

0 1 . 3 What sort of attackers are hyenas?

Tough

Vulnerable

Reluctant

0 1 . 4 What does Pi hope will distract the hyena away from him?

Its mother

The other animals on the boat

The horizon

**This response would score 1 out of 4 marks.**

- 1.1 The response here selects an answer from outside of the stated lines, as the appearance of hyenas is not introduced until the third paragraph. The answer therefore scores 0 marks.
- 1.2 This answer is correct. The response correctly identifies the word 'group' as a synonym for 'pack' and therefore scores 1 mark.
- 1.3 The correct response is 'tough'. It is possible that the word 'hardy' has been misunderstood or misread as 'hardly' with the response being 'reluctant'. This response therefore scores 0 marks.
- 1.4 This question requires careful reading; although 'mothers' are mentioned in the text, along with the idea of being 'distracted', the text and/or question has been misread/misunderstood. It is the 'other animals on the boat' that Pi hopes will distract the hyena, so the given response is incorrect and scores 0 marks.

Response B

0 1 . 1 What worries Pi about the hyena?

Its appearance

Remembering what his father told him about hyenas

The noise it is making

0 1 . 2 How do hyenas usually attack?

On their own

In a pair

As a group

0 1 . 3 What sort of attackers are hyenas?

Tough

Vulnerable

Reluctant

0 1 . 4 What does Pi hope will distract the hyena away from him?

Its mother

The other animals on the boat

The horizon

**This response would score 4 out of 4 marks.**

- 1.1 This answer is correct. The response identifies that the second sentence states that Pi had 'not forgotten Father's words' and made the correct connection with the second response, which states that it is '[r]emembering what his father told him...' that worries Pi. The response therefore scores 1 mark.
- 1.2 This response is correct. The word 'group' is correctly identified as a synonym for 'pack' and therefore scores 1 mark.
- 1.3 This response is correct. The response shows understanding of 'hardy' as a synonym for 'tough' and selects the correct answer, therefore scoring 1 mark.
- 1.4 This response is correct. It locates the correct mention of a distraction on line 8 and shows understanding that this answer fulfils the demands of the question. It therefore scores 1 mark.

## Question 3

This question covers AO2 and the use of structural features to achieve effects. The question now offers learners a specific effect to help focus their responses and provides extra guidance in the bullet points by giving generic structural features that could be commented on.

### Question

You now need to think about the structure of the source as a whole.

This text is from the middle of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to create tension?

You could write about:

- how tension has increased or decreased by the end of the source
- how the writer uses structure to create an effect
- the writer’s use of any other structural features, such as changes in mood, tone or perspective.

**[8 marks]**

### Mark scheme

<p><b>AO2</b> Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views</p>		
<p><b>This question assesses structure:</b> i.e. structural features such as a pivotal point, juxtaposition, flash back, shifts in focus, mood or tone, contrast, narrative pace and/or other structural features</p>		
Level	Skills descriptors	Indicative standard
<p>Level 4 Perceptive, detailed analysis  7–8 marks</p>	<p>Shows perceptive and detailed understanding of structural features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyses the effects of the writer’s choices of structural features</li> <li>• Selects a range of judicious examples</li> <li>• Makes sophisticated and accurate use of subject terminology</li> </ul>	<p>This indicative standard is not a model answer, nor a complete response. Nor does it seek to exemplify any particular content. Rather, it is an indication of the standard for the level.</p> <p>The structure of the first half of the source establishes the unequal power dynamic between the narrator and the hyena. The first sentence immediately introduces the narrator’s concern, ‘it was the hyena that worried me’ and this foreshadows the pivotal point of the extract: Pi passively watching the hyena’s wild, noisy behaviour. However, instead of moving straight to the rising action, the writer includes some detailed description of the hyena, including ominous details about its ability to hunt. By building the tension in this way, it makes us share Pi’s terror when the hyena actually appears, especially as we are sharing Pi’s first-person perspective.</p>

	<p>Shows clear understanding of structural features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains clearly the effects of the writer’s choices of structural features</li> <li>• Selects a range of relevant examples</li> <li>• Makes clear and accurate use of subject terminology</li> </ul>	<p>Although there is little action in the first half of the source, the writer deliberately mentions the hyena right at the start to foreshadow the incident that follows. By saying ‘It was the hyena that worried me’, the writer immediately introduces the main element of tension in the source. The pivotal point occurs when the hyena suddenly comes out and begins running in circles, bringing Pi’s fears to life. By describing the hyena’s erratic movements and going into lots of background detail about it, the reader anticipates the hyena’s threatening behaviour.</p>
<p>Level 2 Some understanding and comment  3–4 marks</p>	<p>Shows some understanding of structural features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to comment on the effect of structural features</li> <li>• Selects some appropriate examples</li> <li>• Makes some use of subject terminology, mainly appropriately</li> </ul>	<p>The writer spends a long time focusing on the hyena at the start of the source. By introducing in the first sentence that ‘it was the hyena that worried me’, it foreshadows the scary behaviour of the hyena. The key moment, when the hyena comes out and starts running in circles, builds tension as we start to realise why Pi might be so concerned about the hyena and what it might do next.</p>
<p>Level 1 Simple, limited comment  1–2 marks</p>	<p>Shows simple awareness of structural features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers simple comment on the effect of structure</li> <li>• Selects simple reference(s) or example(s)</li> <li>• Makes simple use of subject terminology, not always appropriately</li> </ul>	<p>The writer focuses on the hyena at the start of the source. The hyena is mentioned in the first sentence when it says ‘it was the hyena that worried me’. This makes us wonder why he is so worried and creates tension as we think about what will happen next, especially as we don’t know where the hyena is or what it is doing. Then we get a lot of description about hyenas so that we can picture it in our mind.</p>
<p>Level 0 No marks</p>	<p>Nothing to reward</p>	

AO2 content may include the effect of structural features such as:

- exposition: background information about hyenas to allow the reader to appreciate the danger Pi could be in
- foreshadowing: early references to Pi’s fear of the hyena, foreshadowing the incident that follows
- pivotal point: sudden appearance and erratic behaviour of the hyena after Pi’s description of its hunting ability
- focus shifts: movement from action to description, including detailed portrayal of the hyena to emphasise its hideous appearance and unpredictable nature
- first person perspective: the reader shares Pi’s thoughts and feelings and sees the hyena’s appearance and behaviour (perhaps unreliably) through his eyes

- motifs: repeated reference to the hyena's 'typical' behaviour to emphasise its unchanging nature, or references to the horizon to represent the (perhaps fading) hope of the narrator
- rising action: increase of tension and pace as the hyena's wild behaviour escalates
- juxtaposition: description of the vicious nature of the hyena contrasted with its behaviour and ultimate vulnerability at the end of the extract
- anti-climax: sudden ending undercuts the previous threat of the hyena, releasing tension as the hyena unexpectedly stops its wild behaviour.

## Student responses

### Response A

The writer opens the text with an immediate sense that Pi is uncomfortable and worried by the situation with the statement, 'it was the hyena that worried me.' This immediately causes tension because the reader understands that there is a threat to Pi, and by the second paragraph we understand that the hyena is close enough to hear 'whining' and is therefore a close and direct threat, thus heightening the already established tension of the opening line.

As the extract develops, the focus shifts to a detailed description of the hyena, which is given as an altogether unattractive picture. Although some may see this description of the hyena as comical, it is evident that the hyena is also a threatening animal, for the writer describes how its ears could have been 'torn off in battle.' The introduction of this description serves to reinforce and increase the tension of the opening paragraphs and seamlessly leads the reader into the inevitable interaction with the hyena. By this point, the reader is anticipating a dangerous and possibly bloody outcome for Pi, who 'prepared for' his 'end', and the tension in the extract is at its peak. Both here and in the rest of the extract, the writer's use of the first-person perspective enhances the tension as our connection to Pi grows and our disgust for the hyena also increases.

By the end of the extract, the tension has dispersed as the writer creates a shift in tone from one of threat to one of comic relief. Rather than seeing Pi meet his 'end', the reader may experience relief and even a moment of humour as the hyena stops 'running in circles' and collapses in a heap of its own vomit. The writer returns to the hyena's whining, but whereas earlier it appeared to be preparing to attack with desperate hunger, now at the end, it is reduced to a pitiable creature and its dramatic humiliation introduces unexpected humour.

### **This is a Level 4 response**

This is an effective response to the new style of question, with frequent and accurate references to the focus (in this case, tension). The response consistently addresses how the writer structures the text to build and release tension, demonstrating a perceptive and detailed understanding of the passage.

The response shows analytical skills by explaining how the writer's structural choices shape the reader's experience. For example, the analysis of the opening line, 'it was the hyena that worried me,' effectively explains how this immediately establishes tension and sets the tone for the extract. The response also tracks the development of tension, showing an awareness of how the structure moves from worry, to heightened fear, and eventually to comic relief: 'The writer returns to the hyena's whining, but where earlier it appeared to be preparing to attack with desperate hunger, now at the end, it is reduced to a pitiable creature and its dramatic reduction and humiliation introduce unexpected humour.'

There is a sense that the whole extract has been understood, and the response demonstrates awareness of why the writer introduces key ideas or images at specific moments. A particularly strong point is the discussion of the hyena's description, which reinforces tension and primes the reader for a dramatic confrontation. The explanation of the shift in tone towards the end of the extract is also perceptive, showing an understanding of how the writer plays with reader expectations to create a sense of relief after sustained tension.

The response is well-supported with effective examples, and subject terminology is used accurately and appropriately. The response demonstrates sophisticated understanding of how narrative choices impact the reader's emotions. The integration of terminology is seamless and reinforces the depth of analysis.

Overall, this response meets the criteria for a high-level answer due to its perceptive analysis of structure, its effective use of evidence and its confident use of subject terminology.

## Response B

The text is taken from the middle of a novel, so the readers will already have a connection to Pi by this point and therefore feel worried for him when he says that he is 'worried' by the hyena. This foreshadows the danger that Pi faces and increases the tension that the reader will feel for the rest of the extract. The tension is high from the start because the reader feels Pi's fear from the information that he received from his father and therefore the threat is foregrounded as Pi being powerless

The focus shifts away from Pi and his fears and memories to the hyena running 'around the zebra in a circle' and it continues to run for some time, as the writer describes how it goes for 'lap after lap'. This shows that the hyena is still a potential threat because Pi is 'seized by fear' and the writer also describes how it was 'hair raising' and that Pi 'tensed' each time it 'came from the stern'. The tension for the reader is at peak levels at this point because we still do not know whether Pi will survive the ordeal. The hyena running round the boat makes the boat sway, reminding the reader of its size and strength that was described at the start. The erratic laps and the hyena's clicking claws heighten its closeness to Pi and the tense anticipation that it could attack with speed and force at any moment.

By the end of the extract the hyena has collapsed, possibly with exhaustion, and it is clear that the threat is over so there is an immediate sense of anti-climax. The sudden humiliation of the hyena creates humour as this 'hardy attacker' is actually terrified.

### This is a Level 3 response

This is a clear response to the new style of question and can be awarded a Level 3 mark. The response makes consistent reference to the focus of the question (tension) and provides clear explanations of how structural features contribute to this effect.

The response effectively tracks the progression of tension throughout the extract, beginning with Pi's initial fear of the hyena, moving through the description of the hyena's erratic movement and concluding with the reduction of tension and sense of anti-climax as the hyena collapses. This structured approach ensures that the response engages with the whole text, demonstrating a clear understanding of how tension fluctuates.

There is a range of relevant examples, such as the analysis of the phrase 'seized by fear,' which reinforces Pi's vulnerability and highlights the heightening tension. The discussion of the repetition in 'lap after lap' effectively explains how the structure sustains the reader's anticipation. While the final part of the response is less developed, it still acknowledges the shift in tone at the end of the passage.

The response also makes clear and accurate use of subject terminology, referring appropriately to foreshadowing and shifts in focus.

### Response C

Pi is frightened by the hyena right at the start because the hyena is scary, so the writer makes tension in the extract. Then the hyena runs in circles and this is scary too. We wonder what the hyena will do next, like will pi be killed?

So when the hyena is running around in circles which is frightening for Pi so the reader is worried again which means that there must be tension.

#### **This is a Level 1 response**

This is a simple response to the task, demonstrating a simple awareness of structural features but without fully explaining their effects. The comments are simple, showing limited understanding of how structural features affect the reader.

The response acknowledges the presence of tension in the extract but does not explore how the writer's choices contribute to this effect. For example, the mention of Pi being frightened by the hyena at the start correctly identifies a moment of tension, but there is no further discussion of how the writer builds or sustains this tension.

The response does reference a structural shift when the hyena is running in circles, but this is presented as a simple observation rather than an analysis of how or why the introduction of this idea affects the reader.

Due to the lack of explanation and development, this remains a Level 1 response. To improve, the response needs to show understanding that is more precise than a simple synonym for 'worried.' There could be more comment on how events and feelings change across the text selecting references and structural phrases that show the development across the text

## Question 4

This question covers AO4 and the skill of evaluation. The reference to a student making the statement has been removed for June 2026 onwards, and learners are encouraged to respond to the statement critically, supporting their judgements with analysis of method and careful references to the text within the given lines. The bullet points offer areas of focus to help learners structure an effective response.

### Question

For this question focus on the second part of the source, from **line 20 to the end**.

In this part of the source, where the hyena comes out from under the tarpaulin, it could be seen as funny rather than threatening. The writer suggests that the hyena is actually no serious threat to Pi.

To what extent do you agree and/or disagree with this statement?

In your response, you could:

- consider your impressions of how the hyena behaves
- comment on the methods the writer uses to present the hyena
- support your response with references to the text.

**[20 marks]**

## Mark scheme

<b>AO4</b> Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references		
<b>Level</b>	<b>Skills descriptors</b>	<b>Indicative standard</b> This indicative standard is not a model answer, nor a complete response. Nor does it seek to exemplify any particular content. Rather, it is an indication of the standard for the level.
<p>Level 4 Perceptive, detailed evaluation  16–20 marks</p>	<p>Shows perceptive and detailed evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops a convincing and critical understanding of ideas</li> <li>• Shows perceptive understanding of writer’s methods</li> <li>• Evaluates critically and in detail the impact of the writer’s ideas and methods on the reader</li> <li>• Selects a range of judicious textual detail</li> </ul>	<p>It would be easy to initially see the hyena’s wild behaviour as frightening but when you look at how it is described then it is definitely more amusing. The way that it ‘ran in circles’ would be intimidating if it was circling its prey, but in fact it is just making itself increasingly sick and confused, despite Pi remaining frozen with fear. The writer uses the repeated circular motion as a symbol for the hyena’s pointless behaviour, as if it does not have a clue what it is doing. This is made even more ridiculous by the repetition of the onomatopoeic ‘yip’ noise that the animal makes. While this going on ‘all morning’ would certainly be annoying, it is hardly the noise of a ferocious predator and the more you say the sound the more trivial it actually becomes. The repetitive nature of both movement and sound emphasises to the reader the bizarre performance that Pi is forced to endure until the sudden anti-climax removes any remaining sense of a threat altogether.</p>
<p>Level 3 Clear, relevant evaluation  11–15 marks</p>	<p>Shows clear and relevant evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes a clear and relevant understanding of ideas</li> <li>• Shows clear understanding of writer’s methods</li> <li>• Evaluates clearly the impact of the writer’s ideas and methods on the reader</li> <li>• Selects a range of relevant textual references</li> </ul>	<p>While Pi is understandably frightened of the hyena, it soon becomes clear that its behaviour is more amusing than threatening. It says ‘All morning the hyena ran in circles going yip yip yip yip yip’. This pattern of circling might remind the reader of a predator circling its prey but in fact doing laps of the boat is all that the hyena does, so it soon stops being frightening. While the writer’s repetition of the onomatopoeic ‘yip’ sound makes the hyena seem relentless, it is more of an amusing sound than it is a terrifying one and it is perhaps more the fact that it goes on ‘all morning’ that wears Pi down. The longer this repeated movement and sound goes on, the less of a surprise it is to us when the hyena suddenly collapses and the threat disappears.</p>

<p>Level 2 Some, evaluation  6–10 marks</p>	<p>Shows some attempts at evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows some understanding of ideas</li> <li>• Shows some understanding of writer’s methods</li> <li>• Makes some evaluative comment(s) on the impact of the writer’s methods and ideas on the reader</li> <li>• Selects some appropriate textual reference(s)</li> </ul>	<p>Pi is clearly frightened of the hyena up until the very end of the extract but a lot of the things that the hyena does are actually quite funny. It says ‘All morning the hyena ran in circles going yip yip yip yip yip’.. The writer has repeated the ‘yip’ sound so that we can see annoying it would be for it stops suddenly at the end of the extract when the hyena just gives up.</p>
<p>Level 1 Simple, limited comment  1–5 marks</p>	<p>Shows simple, limited evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows simple, limited understanding of ideas</li> <li>• Shows limited understanding of writer’s methods</li> <li>• Makes simple, limited evaluative comment(s) on the impact of the writer’s methods and ideas on the reader</li> <li>• Selects simple, limited textual reference(s)</li> </ul>	<p>‘All morning the hyena ran in circles going yip yip yip yip yip’... The writer uses the sounds of the animal so that the reader can imagine what it is doing and the noise it is making. You could definitely see why an animal behaving like this would be funny to watch</p>
<p>Level 0 No marks</p>	<p>Nothing to reward.</p>	

**Note:** Reference to the writer’s methods may be implicit without specific mention of the writer. Similarly, the evaluative ‘I do/I don’t agree’ may be implicit. In both these cases credit should be given according to the quality of what is written.

AO4 content may include the evaluation of ideas and methods such as:

- Pi’s wariness of the hyena, shown through a first-person perspective and presented by his thoughts, feelings and actions, ‘seized with fear’, although these thoughts could be seen as unreliable
- description of the hyena running, with dynamic verbs such as ‘beating’, ‘clicking’ and ‘racing’ to emphasise its speed and strength, especially alongside threatening references such as ‘maniacal beast’
- the increasing tension of the section, emphasised by the use of short sentences, ‘I prepared for my end’ to enhance the danger of the situation, although this could be seen as hyperbole
- the repeated ‘circling’ of the hyena, showing a sustained threat and symbolising Pi’s feelings of fear and entrapment, although it could also show the ridiculousness of the hyena’s behaviour

- the use of sounds, including the repeated 'yip', to reflect the relentless nature of the hyena's behaviour, although this could be seen as more humorous than threatening
- the contrast of the 'horizon' representing a 'salvation' that Pi is at risk of losing if the hyena kills him
- the sudden, anti-climactic ending, where the hyena suddenly and comically collapses, reveals Pi's over-reaction to its threat.

## Student responses

### Response A

In the extract, Martel presents the hyena as both threatening and comical. I partially disagree with the statement, that the hyena could be seen as funny 'or' frightening, because I think that there is enough evidence to support both of these possibilities; the hyena is both funny *and* frightening. It's unpredictable and erratic behaviour creates an unsettling atmosphere, yet there are also absurd and almost ridiculous elements to its actions. The contrast between these two interpretations highlights the author's blend of tension with dark humour, leaving the reader both wary and amused by the animal's antics. Therefore, it is possible to evaluate the hyena as being funny, despite the obvious threat to Pi.

Structurally, the hyena's behaviour in the extract initially evokes fear – the threat is there from its first introduction and in the second half of the extract, its sudden movement as it 'leapt over the zebra' and 'onto the stern bench' creates a sense of unpredictability. The verb 'leapt' suggests an aggressive and uncontrolled energy, making the hyena appear dangerous. Furthermore, Pi's reaction, 'I was seized by fear and could only watch', reinforces this sense of threat. The fact that Pi is frozen, unable to act, mirrors the reader's own apprehension. The idea that the hyena might attack at any moment keeps both Pi and the reader on edge, giving the impression that the hyena is a force to be feared.

The writer also uses repetition to emphasise the hyena's relentless energy. The description of its movement, 'one lap-two-three-four-five-and onwards, non-stop, till I lost count', portrays the animal as tireless and almost mechanical. This rapid, ceaseless motion makes the hyena seem manic and difficult to predict, which heightens the sense of unease. The phrase 'till I lost count' suggests that Pi, and by extension the reader, is overwhelmed by the sheer length of time the hyena spends running in circles. This exaggerated behaviour contributes to the animal's unsettling presence, and heightens the danger posed by the hyena - with which Pi is trapped on a boat.

However, there is also an undeniably humorous aspect to the hyena's behaviour. Its repetitive running—likened to an 'indoor track'—transforms what should be a menacing display into something absurd. The image of a hyena mindlessly and childishly circling a lifeboat for an extended period is more comical than threatening. Additionally, the repeated high-pitched 'yip yip yip yip' noise diminishes the hyena's ferocity. Martel's use of onomatopoeia captures the almost cartoonish nature of the sound, making it seem more irritating than menacing. Instead of the deep growls one might associate with a predator, the hyena emits a sound reminiscent of a small, excitable dog, which lessens the reader's fear.

Pi's own perception of the hyena also influences the reader's response. He describes its expression as 'blank and frank, jaw hanging open, big ears sticking up rigidly, eyes bright and black.' The detailed description, with its emphasis on the hyena's awkward appearance, makes it seem less like a ruthless killer and more like a confused and somewhat foolish creature. The phrase 'jaw hanging open' suggests mindlessness rather than calculation, while the rigid ears and bright eyes make the hyena appear more bewildered than menacing. This almost comical depiction further complicates the reader's response, making it difficult to see the hyena as a purely terrifying presence.

As the passage progresses, the hyena's behaviour takes a more pitiful turn. After running in circles for an extended period, it finally stops, producing 'deep groans interrupted by fits of heavy panting.' This shift from manic energy to exhaustion makes the hyena seem weak and pathetic rather than threatening. The final image of the animal vomiting and then lying in its own sickness, 'exploring the furthest confines of animal anguish', elicits a sense of discomfort but also pity. The phrase 'animal anguish' suggests suffering rather than malice, further reducing any lingering perception of the hyena as a serious threat. Instead, it seems like a creature overwhelmed by its own fear and confusion. The contrast between the initial tension and the eventual pathetic state of the animal creates a darkly humorous effect. In conclusion, the hyena in this passage is both threatening and amusing.

#### **This is a Level 4 response**

This is a convincing and critical response to the question. It demonstrates a convincing understanding of the text and offers a nuanced and critical response to the question; there is a sense of a full appreciation of the task. The response suggests that it is not a case of 'either or' in their evaluation of the hyena but presents a critical argument that both ideas could be valid. Other Level 4 responses may succeed equally well by exploring only one element of the statement.

There is a critical evaluation of the writer's ideas throughout the response, which is also supported throughout with a judicious selection of textual detail. The understanding of methods is perceptive and is presented to demonstrate thorough appreciation of the choices made by the writer to bring about specific effects, which in turn are used to support the argument that the hyena is both threatening and funny. In this response, the bullet points have been effectively addressed; there is a detailed focus on the concepts of humour and fear. While this answer is methods-led, Level 4 is achieved through the quality of the evaluation first and foremost.

This response demonstrates an effective use of the bullet points as guidance to help focus the response. Using the bullet points as a scaffold for structuring the answer may not benefit all students, however.

## Response B

I agree with the statement that the hyena could be perceived as funny or threatening but overall I think the hyena is a threat. It is not funny to be trapped on a boat with a killer animal who's behaviour makes it frightening. Its behaviour might seem weird but this does not make it funny. It just shows that the animal is unpredictable and that Pi should be frightened. We do not know if Pi is going to survive and there is nothing funny about that.

At the start the hyena is frightening and its behaviour is strange. It is whining which makes it sound afraid. Pi is also afraid so we think the hyena is a threat. From the beginning, Pi is worried about the hyena and this carries on, so I think the hyena could be dangerous. This weird behaviour suggests confusion, but also it's really unpredictable, so the reader understands that it's a threat. The phrase 'whimpering and hesitating' might make us feel sorry for the hyena at first, but then again later it is more frightening. Pi says, 'I was seized by fear and could only watch.' The fact that he is frozen shows he feels the danger, he is just standing there, trapped with a wild animal that could attack him at any moment.

Also, the hyena keeps running around which makes it sound frightening. Pi describes how it 'ran around the zebra in a circle' and continued 'non-stop, till I lost count.' This maybe shows that the hyena is stressed out and therefore the hyena could strike. It is moving 'non-stop' which shows the hyena has lots of energy, making it seem even more dangerous.

By the end of the passage, the hyena remains a threat even though it has laid down collapsing exhausted in its own sick. It is making 'deep groans'. This may show it is hurt or in pain or maybe the hyena has just had enough. The writer uses the phrase 'deep groans' to suggest that it is not just suffering but also frustrated. The hyena may be confused to be on a boat. At the end the threat is still there even if the hyena is lying down groaning so I still don't find it funny and I don't think pi does neither.

### This is a Level 2 response

This answer keeps a focus on the question and responds well to the bullet points; there are attempts to comment on the statement throughout the response and there is some understanding of the ideas throughout the response too. The response engages with the methods employed by the writer, although the comments on this are not yet specific enough to be awarded Level 3.

Some appropriate references are chosen to support the response. There is use of appropriate detail to support ideas and the response often engages with this in attempts to comment on the methods too. The response argues that the hyena is frightening and not at all funny; this has worked well in this instance as the response has been kept on track with one focus. There is some light-touch reference to the idea that the hyena could not possibly be seen as funny, which also works well to reinforce this answer's argument.

## Question 5

This question focuses on AO5 and AO6. A prompt has been added to the descriptive question that a learner can use their own imagination and do not need to describe the provided image in their response. The narrative question has been updated to state that learners should write the opening of a story rather than construct a full narrative.

### Question

A wildlife magazine is running a creative writing competition. Choose one of the options below for your entry.

Either

Write a description of a zoo or wildlife park from your imagination. You may choose to use the picture provided for ideas.

or

Write the opening of a story about a human meeting an animal.

**(24 marks for content and organisation  
16 marks for technical accuracy)**

**[40 marks]**

## Mark scheme

<b>AO5 Content and organisation</b> Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.				
<b>Level</b>		<b>Skills descriptors</b>	<b>Typical features – descriptive writing</b>	<b>Typical features – narrative</b>
		This is not intended to be a checklist, but an indication of the typical features often included by candidates working at each level		
Level 4 Compelling, convincing communication 19–24 marks	Upper Level 4  22–24 marks	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is convincing and compelling and directly relevant to focus and task</li> <li>• Tone, style and register are assuredly matched to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Extensive and ambitious vocabulary with sustained crafting of linguistic devices</li> </ul> <p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and inventive use of structural features</li> <li>• Writing is compelling, incorporating a range of convincing and complex ideas</li> <li>• Fluently linked paragraphs with seamlessly integrated discourse markers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive and original imagery.</li> <li>• Compelling and evocative description.</li> <li>• Impressive vocabulary used judiciously.</li> <li>• Conceptualized ideas developed well.</li> <li>• Subtle detail and ideas.</li> <li>• Compelling use of linguistic devices and impressive control of phrasing.</li> <li>• Fluid sequence of ideas.</li> <li>• Highly successful control of mood/ atmosphere.</li> <li>• Crafted style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive and original narrative perspective.</li> <li>• Convincing character/s.</li> <li>• Impressive vocabulary, used judiciously.</li> <li>• Detailed and convincing setting.</li> <li>• Conceptualized ideas.</li> <li>• Convincing sequence of events, skilful temporal and spatial shifts.</li> <li>• Impressive control of phrasing.</li> <li>• Subtle and skilful shifts in mood/ atmosphere.</li> <li>• Crafted style.</li> </ul>
	Lower Level 4  19–21 marks	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is convincing and directly relevant to focus and task</li> <li>• Tone, style and register are convincingly matched to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Extensive vocabulary with conscious crafting of linguistic devices</li> </ul>		

		<p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and effective structural features</li> <li>• Writing is highly engaging with a range of developed complex ideas</li> <li>• Consistently coherent use of paragraphs with integrated discourse markers</li> </ul>		
<p>Level 3 Consistent, clear communication 13–18 marks</p>	<p>Upper Level 3  16–18 marks</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is consistently clear and consistently relevant to focus/task</li> <li>• Tone, style and register are clearly and consistently matched to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and phrasing, chosen for effect with a range of successful linguistic devices</li> </ul> <p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective use of structural features</li> <li>• Writing is engaging, using a range of clear, connected ideas</li> <li>• Coherent paragraphs with integrated discourse markers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective imagery.</li> <li>• Clear description that explores details.</li> <li>• Precise and well-chosen vocabulary.</li> <li>• A range of details described.</li> <li>• Developed theme/s and ideas.</li> <li>• Controlled use of vocabulary and linguistic devices.</li> <li>• Clearly shaped sequence of ideas/images.</li> <li>• Creates clear mood/ atmosphere.</li> <li>• Clear and controlled use of style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear narrative perspective.</li> <li>• Develops characters effectively.</li> <li>• Precise and well-chosen vocabulary.</li> <li>• Establishes setting with clear details.</li> <li>• Shapes and controls a sequence of events.</li> <li>• Uses temporal and spatial shifts with success.</li> <li>• Clearly establishes plot.</li> <li>• Controls the pace and ideas within the narrative.</li> <li>• Creates and maintains a specific mood/ atmosphere.</li> <li>• Clear and controlled use of style.</li> </ul>
	<p>Lower Level 3  13–15 marks</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication is generally clear and relevant to focus/task</li> <li>• Tone, style and register are generally matched to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Vocabulary clearly chosen for effect and appropriate use of linguistic devices</li> </ul>		

		<p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually effective use of structural features</li> <li>• Writing is engaging, with a range of connected ideas</li> <li>• Usually coherent paragraphs with range of discourse markers</li> </ul>		
<p>Level 2 Some successful communication 7–12 marks</p>	<p>Upper Level 2  10–12 marks</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates with some sustained success and sustained relevance to focus/task</li> <li>• Some sustained attempt to match tone, style and register to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Conscious use of vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices</li> </ul> <p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some use of structural features</li> <li>• Increasing variety of linked and relevant ideas</li> <li>• Some use of paragraphs and some use of discourse markers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to use imagery for effect.</li> <li>• Some development of detail and description.</li> <li>• Some range of vocabulary and/or attempts ambitious vocabulary.</li> <li>• Attempts some development of setting/place.</li> <li>• Some scope of ideas</li> <li>• Some use of linguistic devices.</li> <li>• Some sequence of ideas/detail.</li> <li>• Attempts to create atmosphere/mood.</li> <li>• Some awareness of style and purpose.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to develop narrative perspective.</li> <li>• Attempts to develop character/s.</li> <li>• Some range of vocabulary and/or attempts ambitious vocabulary.</li> <li>• Attempts some development of setting.</li> <li>• Some sequencing/developing of events.</li> <li>• Some use of linguistic devices.</li> <li>• Some establishing of plot.</li> <li>• Some control of pace.</li> <li>• Attempts to create atmosphere/mood.</li> <li>• Some awareness of style and purpose.</li> </ul>
	<p>Lower Level 2  7–9 marks</p>	<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates with some success and some relevance to focus/task</li> <li>• Attempts to match tone, style and register to purpose and audience</li> <li>• Attempts to vary vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices</li> </ul> <p><b>Organisation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to use structural features</li> <li>• Some linked and relevant ideas</li> </ul>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attempt to write in paragraphs with some discourse markers, not always appropriate</li></ul>		
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NB – If a candidate does not directly address the focus of the task, their communication cannot be clear or convincing and therefore the mark for AO5 is capped at the top of Level 2 –12 marks

<b>AO6 Technical accuracy</b> Students must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Skills descriptors</b>
Level 4 13–16 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence demarcation is consistently secure and consistently accurate</li> <li>• Wide range of punctuation is used with a high level of accuracy</li> <li>• Uses a full range of appropriate sentence forms for effect</li> <li>• Uses Standard English consistently and appropriately with secure control of complex grammatical structures</li> <li>• High level of accuracy in spelling, including ambitious vocabulary</li> <li>• Extensive and ambitious use of vocabulary</li> </ul>
Level 3 9–12 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence demarcation is mostly secure and mostly accurate</li> <li>• Range of punctuation is used, mostly with success</li> <li>• Uses a variety of sentence forms for effect</li> <li>• Mostly uses Standard English appropriately with mostly controlled grammatical structures</li> <li>• Generally accurate spelling, including complex and irregular words</li> <li>• Increasingly sophisticated use of vocabulary</li> </ul>
Level 2 5–8 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence demarcation is mostly secure and sometimes accurate</li> <li>• Some control of a range of punctuation</li> <li>• Attempts a variety of sentence forms</li> <li>• Some use of Standard English with some control of agreement</li> <li>• Some accurate spelling of more complex words</li> <li>• Varied use of vocabulary</li> </ul>
Level 1 1–4 marks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional use of sentence demarcation</li> <li>• Some evidence of conscious punctuation</li> <li>• Simple range of sentence forms</li> <li>• Occasional use of Standard English with limited control of agreement</li> <li>• Accurate basic spelling</li> <li>• Simple use of vocabulary</li> </ul>
Level 0 No marks	Students' spelling, punctuation etc. is sufficiently poor to prevent understanding or meaning.

## Response A

The forest was breathing. Not in the way the wind shifts through branches or the way leaves sigh underfoot, but in a way that made Eliza's skin prickle. It was alive, pulsing with something unseen, something watching.

She had been walking for hours, the old map crumpled in her pocket serving as more of a comfort than a guide. It was barely legible, its edges worn soft by time and use. She had stopped relying on it a mile ago, realising that the landscape had shifted since the ink had dried. The trees loomed taller than she had anticipated, their thick, twisted roots threading together like fingers clasping a secret.

The sun was beginning to bow to the horizon, and she knew she should turn back. Every rational part of her screamed for retreat, but something held her there, a pull just beneath her ribs, urging her to take one more step. And then another. And another. A rustle in the undergrowth. Eliza froze. The air thickened, heavy with anticipation. Her heart climbed into her throat, hammering against the fragile walls of silence. The sound came again. Not the dry scamper of a squirrel or the nervous flutter of a bird, but something deliberate. Something with weight.

Then she saw it.

At first, it was just a shadow - an absence of light between the trees. But as her eyes adjusted, the form sharpened. A creature unlike anything she had ever seen stood barely ten feet away, its golden eyes fixed on her with an unreadable intensity. It was large, wolf-like, but not quite. Its fur was deep, shifting in hues of obsidian and ink, so black it seemed to drink the last rays of sunlight.

Eliza's breath hitched. She had read stories, legends passed down in whispers, about creatures that walked the border of the real and the unreal. Beings that belonged to neither world, yet commanded both.

The beast took a step forward, its massive paws pressing soundlessly into the damp earth. It did not growl, did not snarl. It simply watched her, its gaze unwavering. She could run. She should run. But her feet remained rooted to the ground as if bound by unseen strings.

The creature tilted its head slightly, curious. Its ears twitched, listening to something Eliza could not hear. A slow, deliberate exhale left its muzzle, curling into the cooling night air like smoke from an extinguished flame.

Then, impossibly, it spoke. Not in words, not in any language known to humankind, but in something deeper. A voice that rumbled through the marrow of her bones, a feeling more than a sound.

'Why have you come?'

Eliza gasped. It wasn't a question she had prepared to answer; it wasn't a question she had ever expected to be asked. Her mouth dried as her thoughts unravelled, like a thread slipping through her fingers.

What could she say? That she had been drawn here by something she didn't understand? That she had always felt there was more to the world than what could be explained by textbooks and logic? That she had come looking for something - anything - to prove that she wasn't just a girl with foolish dreams?

The creature waited.

'I- I don't know,' she admitted at last, her voice barely louder than the whispering trees. The golden eyes held hers for a long moment. And then, slowly, the beast lowered itself onto its haunches, settling into the earth like a shadow returning home.

'Then listen.'

The word was both invitation and command. The wind stirred, carrying a whisper of something ancient, something vast. The trees seemed to lean in closer, their branches forming a cathedral of green and gold above her head. The ground beneath her feet hummed with life, a heartbeat she had never noticed before. Eliza closed her eyes, inhaling the scent of damp moss, of pine and earth. And for the first time in her life, she understood what it meant to \*belong\* to the world, rather than just exist within it.

When she opened her eyes, the creature was still there, watching.

The night was settling in now, draping the forest in its cool embrace. But Eliza knew, without doubt, that she had found what she had been searching for.

Or perhaps, it had found her. Whichever way that fate had fallen, their lives were now irrevocably intertwined. They turned and stepped together, back into the forest. Life was about to begin.

### This is a Level 4 response

This is a convincing response, directly relevant to the focus and task. Although the story feels well rounded and arguably complete in itself, the final line, 'Life was about to begin', gives the sense that this is the opening to a longer piece and as such, showing clear understanding that only the opening of a story is requested.

For Level 4 there is a conceptual aspect – which lifts responses from Level 3. Here there is a sense of nature being a sentient force and one which provides the character with power and therefore agency.

The tone and style of the response are very well-matched to the task; this is a very well-crafted creative writing entry for a competition, but also there is a sense that the specific audience – readers of a wildlife magazine – has been considered and understood.

The response uses an extensive and ambitious vocabulary, and it is important to note that the vocabulary here is not a word list which has been shoehorned into the response; the vocabulary is aptly deployed and contributes to the crafting of effective imagery. 'The wind stirred, carrying a whisper of something ancient, something vast' is an example of this, for the words 'stirred' and 'vast' may not seem to be ambitious or extensive alone, but they are used here with impressive effect.

The response varies both the sentence and paragraphs for effect and, again, these support the overall structure of the piece; they do not seem to be forced into place but rather carefully considered. The paragraphs are expertly linked and there is a sense of continuity throughout the response.

For AO6, the response also scores highly. Not only is the piece free of errors but there is a wide range of punctuation and sentence forms for effect. The overall piece is consistently secure and accurate for technical accuracy.

### Response B

James had never had a dog before. He'd never even wanted one, if he was honest, the idea of muddy paw prints on the carpet, dog hair on his clothes, and the smell! Also he was not too keen on the idea of having to walk a dog. He loved the countryside and to hear the birds overhead and he did not like seeing other people's dog mess, he shuddered just thinking about it. But now, standing in his aunt's garden, staring at the overexcited bundle of fur in front of him, he wasn't sure what to think. Excitement rose in him like a balloon.

The puppy, a golden retriever no bigger than a shoebox, bounced toward him with overexcited energy. Its ears flopped left and right as it ran, paws too big for its body, tail wagging so fast it was like a blur. James took an awkward step back. 'He won't bite,' Aunt Lisa laughed, watching from the doorway. 'Go on, say hello.' James swallowed a lump of nerves, he had never been afraid of dogs exactly, but he didn't know how to act around them.

The puppy had no worries, it was as free as a bird. Within seconds, it launched itself at James's trainers, gnawing at the laces with tiny, sharp teeth. He jerked his foot back, but the puppy only looked up at him, tongue hanging out, eyes which said please play with me!!

'Guess he likes you,' Aunt Lisa said and she laughed. James wasn't so sure. He crouched down hesitantly, watching as the puppy tried to pounce on a stray leaf which had been floating through the sky like a piece of litter. It tripped over its own feet, then it landed and rolling onto its back, legs in the air.

Even though James felt unsure, he chuckled. The puppy stopped moving and turned its head towards him, as if it had just noticed. Then, in a blur of golden fur, it scrambled upright and climbed up his legs and flung itself into his lap.

'Whoa okay!' James said, nearly toppling over. The puppy licked his chin, paws pressing against his chest. It smelled of biscuits and looked like sunshine.

Aunt Lisa grinned. 'Looks like you've made a friend.'

James sighed, wiping his damp face with his sleeve, but even though he signed, he was not cross really. As the puppy curled up in his lap, still wriggling slightly but beginning to settle, he realised something unexpected. Maybe dogs weren't so bad after all.

'Shall we find your lead?'

### This is a Level 3 response

This is a generally clear response to the task as this is a clear opening to a story and the tone, style and register are generally matched to the purpose. It is not particularly evident that this is for a 'wildlife magazine' as the task states, although there is a possible nod to this in the opening paragraph. This is clearly a story about a human meeting an animal and so the brief has been met.

The vocabulary has clearly been chosen for effect in places; words such as 'launched' and 'pounced' to describe the puppy's movements work well. A feature of 'clear' communication is the unpacked description – where there are layers to the description that create a clear image for the reader. Here the use of linguistic devices in the description of the puppy guides the reader to what the writer has imagined and therefore is clear.

Structural features are used effectively, with paragraphs usually marking a shift in person, topic, place or time. The writing progresses coherently and sequentially, with clear development from the puppy's excitement to relaxation, and a bond being created. The writing is generally engaging, with a range of ideas and it is clear that this is the start of a longer story, so it fulfils the demands of the task to write the opening to a story.

The AO6 mark is also Level 3, because a variety of sentence forms have been used for effect and standard English has been used appropriately. Punctuation is used effectively for speech, although in some instances, the control of punctuation is less successful.

### Response C

the zoo was bissy and full of noize. People were walking everywhere, chatting and laughing. Children ran ahead of there parents, pointing at the animals and shouting in excitemint. The air smelled like popcorn and hotdogs, mixed with the strange smells of the animals muck there were lots of cages and inclosures, each one holding a different kind of animal. In one area, monkees swung from branches, chatering loudly. they looked funny as they jumped from one tree to another, scratching thereselves and starring at the visitors. Some of them picked up bits of food and threw them at the visitors!!

futher along, the lion inclosure was surrounded by a big glass wall. The lions were lieing down, looking sleepy in the sun. One of them lifted its head and let out a big yawn, showing its sharp teath. People took pictures, and a little boy banged on the glass, trying to get the lion to move. His mum told him of, but he just laughed

the pingiun area was cold and smelled of fish. the pinguins waddled around clumsy, some of them diving into the water and swimming really fast!! People leaned over the railing to watch them splash around. A zookeyper stood nearby, talking about how pingins keep warm even in freezing water. They have a speshial layer of feathers which is covered in a certain oil which helps!

in the reptilal house, it was dark and warm! Snakes lay curled up under there heat lamps, there scales shiny. A crocodile floated in a big tank, its eyes just above the water, it looked like a right menace! was real or fake?

the day went on, and the zoo stayed bussy. Ice cream melted in the sun, and the sounds of animals and people filled the air. as familys started leaving, some kids begged to stay longer, while others were already asleep in there pushchairs. the zoo was a place full of life, where people could see animals from all over the world, even if only for a day

### **This is a Level 2 response**

Despite the technical inaccuracies, this response is into Level 2 for content and organisation. There is a focus on the task and some success in the communication. There is an attempt to use structural features: each paragraph is organised around a different area of the zoo and there are some linked and relevant ideas in and between the paragraphs. The final paragraph ends with 'the day went on' and thus indicates a sense of progression. Additionally, the response closes with the paragraph 'zoo stayed bissy [sic]' which is another attempt to use structural features, as the opening paragraph starts with the same idea.

There are some attempts to vary vocabulary and use linguistic devices: the crocodile looks 'like a right menace', the snakes' scales are 'shiny', and the monkeys are 'chatering [sic] loudly'. There are other examples of such attempts throughout the piece.

For the AO6 mark, this piece also falls into Level 2. Although the response has not always demarcated sentences – especially at the end of each paragraph – there are enough examples of successful demarcation to credit in Level 2. The piece is lacking a range of punctuation, although there are some examples of accurately placed commas and some varied vocabulary.

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