



GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2005 the English (ESL) examination paper consisted of two Sections: in Section 1 students were required to respond on one text, while in Section 2 they had to complete three different tasks in response to given material. As in previous years, a small number of students submitted more than one response to Section 1. *Gattaca* was the most popular text again this year, and the six most popular texts produced 78 per cent of all responses. There were no responses on two texts and a further five texts attracted fewer than 10 responses. In Section 2 almost all students responded to all three tasks.

Marking policies

Assessment is holistic, using the published criteria, and assessors relate student performance directly to these criteria. These judgements are assisted by the use of a set of descriptors. Both the criteria and the descriptors are fully explored and directly related to the range of student responses during intensive assessor training before and during the marking process. Teachers and students should be aware of both the assessment criteria and the descriptors. These are published on the VCAA website at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/english. The ESL Exam Criteria page also contains an explanation of the allocation of marks for Parts 1 and 2 of the Writing Task.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section 1 – Text response

Students were required to produce one piece of analytical or expository writing in response to one text. There were two topics for each of the prescribed texts. The layout of the English (ESL) paper remained similar to previous years and did not appear to have created any misunderstanding about task requirements.

The best students' work showed an ability to craft meaningful, analytical and relevant discussions in direct response to the chosen question. While good answers showed detailed textual knowledge, the best ones skilfully wove this knowledge into the fabric of the analysis.

The most popular texts and their mean scores are shown in the table below.

Text	% Answered	Mean Score
<i>Gattaca</i>	43.87	5.7
<i>The Wife of Martin Guerre</i>	13.41	5.9
<i>Stolen</i>	7.37	6.3
<i>King Oedipus</i>	6.43	6.3
<i>I'm not Scared</i>	6.31	5.7

The overall mean score was 5.89.

The first *Gattaca* topic was the more popular. This simply worded question gave students plenty to write about, resulting in a full range of responses. Better responses discussed Vincent's weaknesses which turned into his strengths, such as wanting the one thing he could not have and then going all out with courage and determination to achieve it. Students with limited language skills were able to answer this question reasonably well. However, many responses limited 'weaknesses' to genetic weaknesses and ignored weaknesses of character. Some simply made lists of strengths and weaknesses. Some wrote as if the question was "Vincent's strengths are greater than his weaknesses." Do you agree? A number of answers devoted a significant part of the essay to detailing ways in which Vincent inspires other characters (derived from last year's topic) but sophisticated answers incorporated some of this material into an argument that one of Vincent's greatest strengths was his ability to inspire other people.

The second *Gattaca* question had less in common with topics from previous years and appeared to attract less 'learnt' material. Sometimes the question was interpreted only as Vincent's family not trusting him to do well. Weaker responses just dealt with Vincent's relationship with Anton and his parents. Better responses dealt in depth with the lack of trust intrinsic in the 'futuristic world of *Gattaca*' but went on to discuss the trust that is essential to relationships such as that of Vincent and Jerome, even in the world of *Gattaca*.



Few responses challenged the contention in the first question on *The Wife of Martin Guerre*. Some just discussed Martin, but better students discussed the question in the context of the times and Bertrande's role. In response to the second question, some students did not identify the problems of the characters before attempting to assess whether or not legal and religious institutions could satisfactorily solve these problems. Others showed little understanding of the workings of the legal and religious institutions of the patriarchal system and simply explored the constraints placed on the characters.

Both questions on *Stolen* lent themselves to writing a history of the characters' problems, what happened to them and why. Question 1 attracted more responses than Question 2. Responses to Question 1 generally focussed on characters' control (or lack of it) but overlooked whether a lack of control was 'inevitable'. Question 1 provided the opportunity to discuss the 'system' and the government as well as an individual's ability to control his/her own life.

The first question on *King Oedipus* called for a judgement and this gave students a tangible approach to take when answering. Better answers could distinguish between Oedipus the man and Oedipus the king.

I'm not Scared was the most popular of the new texts in 2005. Both topics worked well, drawing responses which ranged from those that attempted a literal reading of the topic to those that attempted more. Competent responses included a discussion of the stages in Michele's growth within the parameters of the question.

Students generally demonstrated an engagement with the ideas of the texts, good essay structure and obvious confidence in how to approach the task. Stronger responses were characterised by appropriate use of embedded quotes, and a good understanding of the instruction to 'discuss'. There were very few short or incomprehensible responses. In some cases there was still an over reliance on story telling and regurgitating practice writing that had slight relevance to the examination topic. Such responses insufficiently analysed the set question or focused on only one aspect of the question. When planning, students need to brainstorm all the key words as well as pay particular attention to modifying words and comparatives within the question.

The following high range response to *The Wife of Martin Guerre* discusses a range of characters. The language is fluent and appropriate without panache. There are thoughtful, insightful comments about the text in relation to the question.

Example 1: 'In *The Wife of Martin Guerre* the main reason for everyone's suffering is that Martin selfishly leaves his family.' Discuss.

In Seventeenth century France the women are viewed as the property of man. They are powerless in the male dominated society. The high feudal and strictly patriarchal society of which Janet Lewis's novella 'The Wife of Martin Guerre' is set in shows that the women are bound to the man as goods and chattels. When Martin Guerre leaves his young wife Bertrande and his family to pursue freedom, he has 'deeply wounded' her. Though he is the main reason for everyone's suffering there are others who are also responsible in this tragic story.

Martin Guerre abandones his family when he feels he has no autonomy while his father is still alive thus his selfish act has caused great pain for his family, especially his wife Bertrande. 'He (has) left her in the full beauty of her youth, in the height of her great passion. He (has) shamed her and wounded her.' Bertrande takes her husband's abandonment to heart. She suffers emotionally as the young wife of Martin Guerre in the Guerre household. When she has given up hope that one day her husband will return, she grows into a strong, independent woman who has the great responsibility as the mistress of the house to look after the entire household. Her son, Sanxi, is the only solace and comfort she has in the household which she is 'entirely along'. Sanxi does not have the love of a father which he longs for and a man he can look up to. Monsieur Guerre's disappointment in his only son is clearly evident. He is a man without much words but he is ashamed that his only son has shied away from his responsibilities as the cap d'hostel. Martin's absence is the main reason for everyone's suffering.

Arnaud du Tilh is the instigator of this whole affair and must take part in the blame. Arnaud has deceived Bertrande and household into believing he is the real Martin Guerre. His deception has 'damned (Bertrande's) soul, (she) has sinned through him'. If Arnaud has not pretended to be Martin Guerre, Bertrande would not have suffered so much pain. However, Lewis positions the reader to sympathise with Arnaud. His love for Bertrande is admirable. '(Her) beauty and grace as for three years' made him an honest man. His love for Bertrande has turned the rogue into a responsible man, kind to the household, a generous cap d'hostel. Arnaud du Tilh is the catalyst. He is part of the reason for everyone's suffering.

Bertrande de Rols's pursuit for the truth undermines her own happiness as well as the happiness of the mesine. Bertrande realises her husband is an imposter and not the real Martin Guerre. She is a devout Catholic and the teachings are deeply embedded in her soul. '(She) must rid herself of him.' Bertrande feels as the wife of Martin Guerre she must search for the truth and thereby gains a peace of mind. She understands what she stood to lose materially and emotionally. Though she loves the imposter still, as a woman of her time, Bertrande must allow legal justice to prevail to diminish the extent of her own 'sins'. She ignores the plight of her son Sanxi and the household for the security of the mesnie. She loses her place in household ironically for the very institutions she defends. Bertrande's search for the truth has caused suffering for the household and the man she loves.



The household is very selfish and ignores Bertrande's pain and suffering. They treat her like a made woman. 'The house prospered surprisingly under this new Martin Guerre.' Therefore they did not want anything to change this happiness and prosperity. 'They were all happy' before Bertrande decides to find the truth. When Bertrande goes to the curé to ask for help, the curé turns a blind eye and accuse her of 'sinning far more' if she continues her search. Their wilful blindness shuns Bertrande to the corner and adds to her suffering.

To some extent, everyone is selfish and cause pain for others. Arnaud wants the money and security of the Guerre family. Bertrande desires to cleanse herself of her 'sins' and of Arnaud. The household wants the happiness under the imposter. For their own desires they are willing to sacrifice others and cause the suffering of the household. Martin's heartless abandonment of the family is the main reason for everyone's suffering but other people must also take part in the blame which ultimately caused Bertrande's tragic downfall and Arnaud's execution. 'When love and hate have together exhausted the soul, the body seldom endures long.'

The following short but well-structured mid-range response to *Stolen* is relevant and displays an adequate knowledge of the text, but limited use of it to support the points being made, particularly in reference to Sandy. Although there is only a passing reference to 'inevitable', it generally focuses on the question rather than attempting to discuss every character. The exploration of ideas is limited and there are obvious weaknesses in expression skills.

Example 2. 'Although the characters in *Stolen* try to take control of their lives, the play shows that it is inevitable that they will fail to achieve that control.' Discuss.

In 'Stolen' every character desperately tried to take control of their lives, but the damage cause by the 'wellfare's' system, was just too much, and sadly both Ruby and Jimmy never got the chance to take control of their lives. On the other hand some characters did, to a certain degree.

'Where are you', while in the Cranby Children's Home, Ruby is always looking for her mother, and because she never finds her, she's always crying and playing with her doll, pretending she's her mother. The emotional effect on Ruby from being away from her mother, never heels, sadly resulting in her loosing her sanity. In the end due to the tough and horrible expiriencess some of which included physical, emotional and sexual abuse, when Ruby's family came for her, she was frightened of the idea of having a family. 'Don't need no family of my own, got enough to do.' Due to the fact that Ruby lossed her sanity, it is fair to say she never had control over her life, furthermore it is inevitable that she never will have control over her own life.

Jimmy as a young boy is a very happy, quite outgoing kind of character, always looking forward to be reunited with his mother. As time goes past, due to his mother's absence, Jimmy becomes a more of a sad character who looses interest in life. All Jimmy ever cared for was to be reunited with his mother, and when he finally got the chance to, his sudden happyness was brought to an end in a short period of time, by the news that his mother had just past away. Just when Jimmy was beggining to get his life together and find out all about his family, and was ready to put the past behind him and move on, his mother's death made him put everything behind him including his own life committing suicide, with the hope of being reunited with his mother, which was all he ever wanted. Due to Jimmy's action and the result of his action, it is clear that Jimmy failed to take control of his life.

On the other hand, Sandy the character who always had patience and hope that one day he will go back home, once he was out of the children's home, he went travelling in search for home. He took control over what he wanted to do and where he wanted to do, which by the end of the play we witness that it paid him off, ending up in the deserd sands a place he called home. From Sandy's ending in the deserd sands, it is clear he took control over his own life and made his own decisions of what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go.

In conclusion it is fair to say that some characters such as Sandy ended up taking control of their lives, but unfortunately this wasn't the case for Ruby who lost her sanity, and Jimmy who in the end took his own life.

Familiarity with the assessment criteria and developing the skills to meet them is essential. Teachers are encouraged to use every avenue to make students familiar with the texts and their major themes and issues. Students should be taught how to analyse a topic's key words and phrases and to respond thematically as a way to avoiding just re-telling the story. Students may be less inclined to retell the story if they have developed some ideas about the text. Planning also helps students to stay on the topic. Choosing texts that have concrete issues for ESL students to grasp and discuss is an important part of making these skills accessible to all ESL students. A thorough knowledge of the text gives even very weak students a good start.

As well as having a knowledge of the text, students need to understand the requirements of a well-structured essay; in particular how to develop a point of view, with one main point in each paragraph which is directly linked to the topic and supported by text examples. The introduction should address the actual question, and not be either excessively long or a generic summary of the text. Students should know the basics of how to analyse the question, focusing on key words, and have an awareness of modifying words and how to use them when planning the response. They must 'unpack' the prompts and take into account all parts of the question. ESL students will often need assistance in acquiring a range of vocabulary that is appropriate for discussing the text they have chosen and that they can draw on to write expressively and effectively in examination conditions. Students also need to be taught how to recognise and



decode the different types of questions asked on texts; for example, 'Discuss', 'Do you agree?' and questions that include 'why' or 'how'.

Section 2 – Writing task

Students were presented with a number of items related to one topic. They were required to complete three tasks in response to this unseen material. The tasks were:

- a note-form summary of a section of the material
- an analysis of language used in another section of the material
- a response to an issue raised by the texts.

Each task was of equal value and three separate scores were given. Clear instructions resulted in virtually no errors in choosing the material for each task. The subject matter made the task very accessible for students.

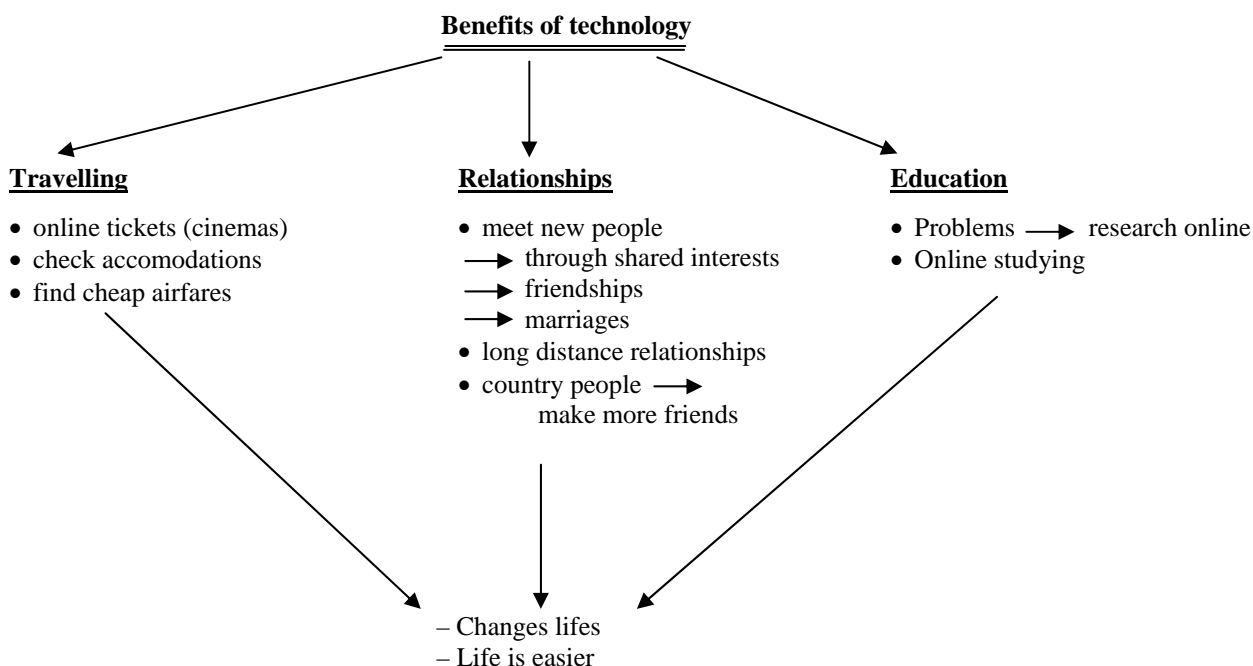
Part 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	3	1	2	4	7	11	17	21	20	11	3	6.4

This year the quality of the note-taking responses was again high and the use of only one text was handled well by students. The material for this task was very straightforward and most students had no difficulty in finding the main points, although a few did not understand the idea of 'the isolation of country living'. There were fewer full sentence or paragraph answers. Strong responses efficiently, cleverly and logically processed the main points into clearly labelled categories, showing links between common ideas. This included some arrows to link relevant parts but not so many that they directed the reader all over the place.

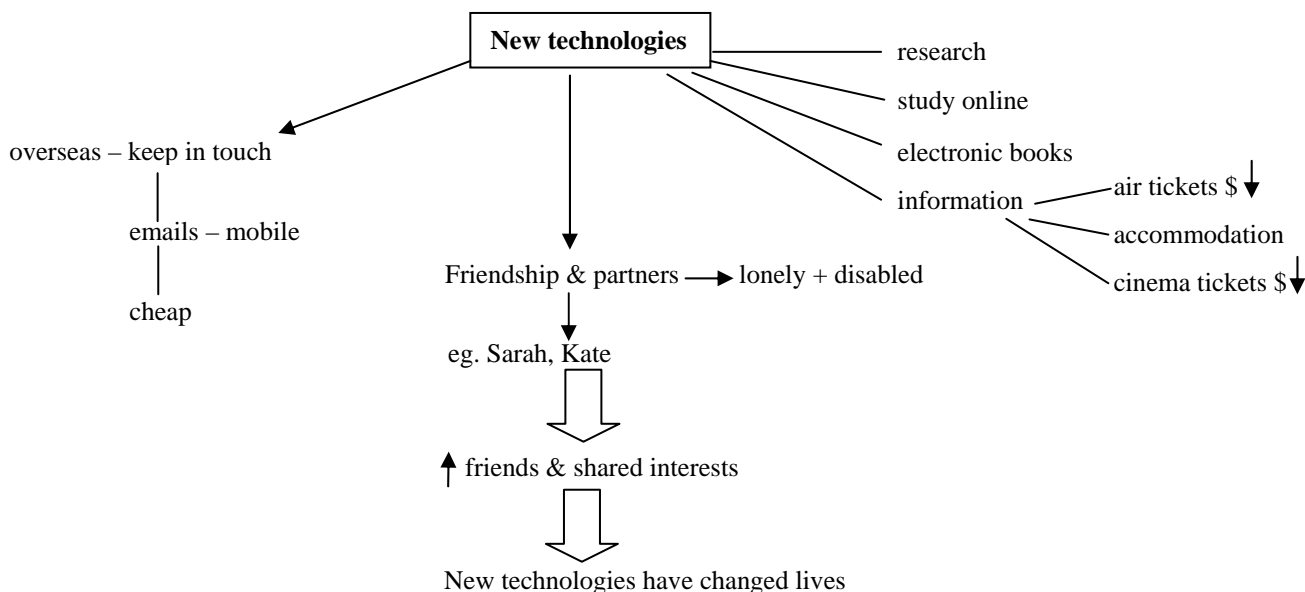
Weaker responses tried to include everything. It is important to be selective about which material to incorporate into the notes. In this scenario, the examples of people who found partners on the Internet should not have been included in the notes. Other weaknesses included trying a yes/no format and creating dot point lists of meaningless information that resulted in a poorly structured listing of every point in the passage. Some students overused boxes and arrows, which confused rather than helped the reader.

Example 1. This example demonstrates understanding, processing and organisation of the material in a meaningful way.





Example 2. This example demonstrates another layout. It includes some unnecessary detail, such as ‘e.g. Sarah, Kate’. It also overlooks the point about the ‘isolation of country living’.



Part 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	16	10	11	11	10	9	9	8	7	5	4	4.0

As in 2004, in Task 2 even students who showed knowledge of what to look for were not always able to apply their knowledge in the context. Strong responses provided simple explanations, focussed on the reader, and were in the context of the material. There was no shortage of examples for students to explain but too many provided de-contextualised definitions of various persuasive language techniques; for example, ‘*We’d all agree that...*’ *The writer used ‘we’ to make the readers feel the sense of togetherness. This made the reader feel that they weren’t left out in any thought and would therefore, most likely to support the writers idea.* The explanation needs to be attached to the context and show an understanding of the passage.

Weaknesses included unnecessarily long explanations that gave the meaning of the sentence rather than the intended effect on the reader, and generic definitions of techniques. It was encouraging that students with weak writing skills could do well in this task, but disappointing that many students did not appear to know how to complete the task.

Students were required to select five examples of different types of persuasive language use and explain how each example works to persuade the reader. How does this language make the reader feel and why might this persuade the reader to agree with the writer’s point of view? Students are not asked to comment on the likely success of the examples or present an argument for or against the point being made.

Example 1. The explanations in the following example focus on the intended effect on the audience and show a clear understanding of the writer’s use of persuasive language. Some points are wordier than necessary.

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Example	How it persuades
'Your e-card is dull and unromantic by comparison'	The writer uses emotive words such as 'dull' and 'unromantic' to paint an extremely negative image of e-cards in the reader's mind. This will arouse a disappointed and sad response from the reader as they feel that hand written letters are much more exciting and romantic.
'...like Dr Bob Montgomery, Director of Communication for Australian Psychological Society'	The writer cites authoritative opinion to strengthen his/her argument. The reader will feel that they should trust the expert's opinion as they much have a lot of knowledge on the subject. They will feel that indeed less effective communication alternatives are of concern and should be discouraged.
'We'd all agree...'	By using inclusive language to enlist the support of the reader, the writer is trying to make the reader feel a sense of obligation to agree with the statement. The reader will then be inclined to support the claim that SMS is not as precious as letter as they feel everyone should agree.
'...just like fertiliser on a garden'	The writer uses figurative language to try to convince the reader of the importance of letter. The reader is enabled to visualise the usefulness and effectiveness of letters. They will feel that letters are unique and there is nothing else that can replace its function in effective communication.
'Who hasn't been disappointed to find that long email from a so-called friend has been CCed to 23 others.'	By using a rhetorical question the writer is inviting agreement from the reader. The reader's attention will be made to focus on the unreliable nature of emails, as they are not unique and specially made to the receiver. The reader will feel cheated, and disappointed and concerned and they will thus totally support the writer as no one wants to be treated in such a way.

Example 2. The explanations below vary in quality, but they do demonstrate an understanding of the task without a reliance on naming techniques.

Example	How it persuades
'A handwritten note is like dining by candlelight instead of turning on the lights.'	The handwriting expert, Margaret Shepherd, likens receiving a handwritten note to having a candlelight dinner. Candlelight dinners are universally perceived as being personal and romantic, as well as thoughtful, and the readers of this article are likely to feel the same way about handwritten notes, through the successful use of this analogy.
'Unless...you have a heart of stone,'	Here, the writer appeals to the readers' thoughts and feelings, by implying that anyone who does not prefer receiving a personal letter in the mail is cold and has 'a heart of stone'.
'...thick, red envelope... fragrant rose petals...face is as red as the envelope and she's smiling.'	Through descriptive and imaginative choice of words, the writer attempts to create a scenario where the readers have received a personal, handwritten card. The writer highlights the joy of opening such a personal card, and invites the readers to share in that feeling of joy. They will likely feel elated, as the description implies, and feel a desire to experience it firsthand and so will feel inclined to take the writer's side of sending personal cards such as this.
'...a brief and impersonal e-card...'	The writer labels e-cards as 'brief' and 'impersonal' in an attempt to convey his feelings about e-cards. The readers would not want to receive an 'impersonal' and 'brief' card, for those words create a negative image of e-cards in the readers' minds, such is not desired. Thus they would not want this sort of empty and meaningless experience happening to them, and would side with the writer's view that handwritten notes are better than e-cards or text messages.
'...an impermanent SMS cannot compare with a precious letter that can be read, read again and carefully stored forever.'	Older readers in particular can relate to this, as they would probably have received letters from loved ones while they were away and understand the joyous feeling of being able to re-read those letters any time they like. They are likely to have a more traditional approach to this issue and not want to change from letters to SMS.

Part 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	2	3	7	14	21	20	16	9	4	1	5.5



Task 3 asked students to write a letter to a magazine. The topic engaged students, but very few made use of the third page of material. Compared to previous years, fewer responses copied large portions directly from the task material, but some letters were very long because students included a lot of detail from personal experience. Students must answer this task in their own words, and, because the topic was familiar to their everyday lives, students may have felt more able to do so this year.

A number of students got caught up in writing about their own use of modern technology to contact family overseas or communicate with a partner. Better responses developed a contention that was supported adequately with information from the articles. These responses also showed clear awareness of the audience and an ability to engage with the subtleties of the material. Such responses were able to endorse the use of new technology while pointing out that it was feeling and content that mattered rather than the mode of communication. Weaker responses got caught up in the Valentine's Day/romance issue rather than the broader picture. Students who attempted to write with an adopted persona were generally not very successful. Some wrote as if 'improved communication' meant 'more communication' rather than examining the quality of the communication. Some brought in other aspects of modern technology; for example, cars and electricity. Others wrote as if the topic was 'the benefits of technology'.

Example 1. This high range response shows competent language skills (even though there are some characteristic ESL errors) and developed ideas, drawing appropriately on the task material. The points are strongly argued and mostly relevant.

To the Editor,

Dear Sir,

The recent published The Right Messages article in your paper has sparked intense debate on whether modern technology has improved communication between people. While there are some people who are very critical of the many modern technologies, there is no doubt that modern technologies has improved communication in many ways.

First of all, modern technologies allow people who are otherwise isolated have access to the world through the use of internet. Having access to internet many people could meet many new people who share the same interest with them and perhaps in a great need of company as themselves. In these cases, many elder and disabled people are enabled to form varies friendship based on their interests and hobbies rather than appearance. Not only that, ordinary people have also benefited from it. As a matter of fact, many of them are already married and formed relationships with people living on the other side of the world.

Furthermore, modern technologies have provided us with conveniences that have become essential to our lifestyle. Many adult students tend to use distant learning through the internet to gain their degree. As a result hours of travel wasted on the road have been eliminated.

Moreover, it also helps improved communication in a sense that it is efficient and time-saving. An apology can be sent without delay to your friends. It also avoids embarrassment for people no longer have to apologize in face. How much easier has technology made our lives become? It have improved our communication and our relationships with other people without a doubt.

The argument that electronic messages are not as sincere as letters is erroneous. It is not electronic messages that are not sincere, it is the people who are sending them. If someone see you as truly special, they can write a long, unique and sweet email can't they? It is ridiculous to blame emails as the scapegoats of someone's insincerity.

There is no doubt that modern technology has improved our lives and communication with other people. The numerous benefits far outweighs any specious disadvantages that have been claimed. May sense prevail so that we can continue to improve our technologies and enjoy the ease that technologies have brought to us, and not let those narrow-minded people stop the progress of our society.

J. Smith

Burwood

Example 2. This mid-range response expresses a clear point of view, draws on the material without direct copying and attempts to use persuasive strategies. The piece has a recognisable structure and adequate expression skills even though the points made are not well developed.

To the Editor

Dear Sir,

I am sure everyone has heard of the current hot issue or even debate that whether or not modern technologies have actually improved communication between people. And I am quite impressed with your article 'The Right Messages' that was published in your magazine. Honestly, I agree that new technologies are not as good as we thought. It might seem more efficient but to compare with an email the actual meaning behind a letter is much more touching. For instance, would you prefer a short text

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message from your partner or a love letter that is decorated with pictures he/she draws for you? I am sure a letter will be the first choice. Moreover, not everyone can deal with the new technologies such as computers or may be sending emails through internet.

My grandmother, for example, will not understand how to operate a computer. That is why I am still using the traditional way, writing a letter, to simply let her know that I am doing fine. An imagery how contented she might be when she met a postman on her way home, is always vivid in my mind. May be it is not as fast as emails but it is more precious than an electronic mail that cannot be kept permanently.

The new technologies have not after all improved communication between people. I am sure many people out there also feel frustrated when an email they received is simply a forwarded message from someone else. This shows in using modern technology, noone even care about the real meaning behind it. After all, I am a strong believer traditional method is still better than email. Thank you.