

# Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression

## Report on the May 2014 examination

As is our custom for anyone awarded an A grade in the exam, we name and congratulate Kristijan Jovanoski. He is in fact the Rhodes Scholar for Victoria for 2014, and leaves for Oxford this month (September). He is also a member of Learningguild, and we offer him our best wishes and our desire to keep in touch with him.

To appreciate the achievement of the other six candidates, all of whom gained the Certificate, one needs to know that they are all Year 11 students at a selective high school for boys. They took the exam on August 30th with Kristijan and on his recommendation: in a letter written in July, he had stated his intention to take it, and invited participation. Since the aim of the chief examiner is to set the exam and have it marked at the old Matriculation level (end of Year 12), it would obviously not be easy for almost anyone now in his or her Year 11. The outcome for the six is creditable: three were adjudged to be at the lower B level, two at the upper C, and one at the middle C.

One general initial comment: all of the candidates would have benefited, and can now benefit, from a study of a well-chosen text that concentrates on what we need to study if our writing and speaking of English is to be clear, precise and unobjectionable. Such books have been given little or no sustained attention in the secondary education of the past thirty-five years. At the senior levels, an outstanding one is *A Wealth of Words*, by two Victorian teachers, H.G.Fowler and N.Russell, first published in 1960. An initial estimate of its value can be made on the basis of the eight chapter headings: "Choosing Words", "Our Debt to Other Languages", "English Doesn't Stand Still", "Increase Your Vocabulary", "Word Traps", "Spelling and Pronunciation", "Say What You Mean", and "Definitions". The student must also learn to parse (i.e., to identify different parts of speech in particular sentences) and to master different types of clause, as students used to do by about the end of Year 9. I have covered that ground in the first two chapters of my book *Making up Sentences (MS)*, published by Learningguild and still awaiting its third edition: those and other chapters are available. A guide to punctuation such as that at the end of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (pp. R22-24 in the eighth edition) should also be studied. For the rest, *A Wealth of Words* remains an excellent guide on errors to avoid and resources to appropriate.

Students acquainted with such work could go on to the Penguin Reference book *The Complete Plain Words*. Its original author was Sir Ernest Gowers, but it has been revised by others for a second and a third edition. That book has recently gone out of print; there ought to be a fourth edition. I showed its value in my article "Questions and principles for sentence-construction", published in *Learningguild Letter* 1.2013 (available at 'Publications' on our website, [learningguild.org.au](http://learningguild.org.au)).

Future candidates would certainly find it helpful to study our past papers and reports, beginning from the last five pairs, which can be found at 'Certificate' on that website. I often recommend the pair for March 2004, one of the best we have produced, which includes a lot of advice on essay-writing. This and other pairs will be given or posted to anyone who pays five dollars or sends seven 70 cent stamps.

## Section 1

The heading to this section has been revised so that its last two sentences make clearer how the set sentences should be viewed: ‘On the one hand, you should in each case ask yourself “Does this sentence, considered as a piece of written English, need correction because of errors or awkwardness?”. On the other, you should make no unnecessary changes.’

Here is my own response to that challenge. I am grateful for discussion with John Drennan and for his marking and annotating of answers in this section. We marked out of the maxima shown.

- a) I find, as a recipient of endless emails, that the commentary or abuse tends to be of one or other of two kinds. (4)
- b) The British have not been as exposed as the French to such art, but there were a lot of favourable reviews. (2)
- c) I want the footy to be fun; what’s the point of it otherwise? (2)
- d) Commentators would do well to forget about being what they aren’t, such as cheerleaders for a result they reckon would be good for football. (3)
- e) It has almost become the case that whoever wins the studio vote is thought to win the argument. (2)
- f) The worst time to sell shares is when the market is falling: don’t make that mistake. (2)
- g) I would not have expected the Australian Tax Office to urge university students to sort out their super. If they do, that will reduce the Office’s revenue. (3)
- h) When you’re sharing a meal at a restaurant dinner, don’t have a salad and nothing to drink and then ask to pay less than others. (3)
- i) Freedom of speech is far more limited in Australia than in the United States. (2)
- j) Correct. (2)
- k) What you write on this form will be considered as evidence relevant to your application to enter the course. (3)
- l) Even when cyclists wear clothes of light or bright colours, a problem for motorists emerges when those clothes are covered by a dark backpack. (2)

The total of those maxima is 30. 20 would get one a middle B, 15 the lowest B (BC), 12 the lowest C (C--), and 10 the narrow fail mark of Just below C. The best mark was a middle B, there was a BC and a CB (the highest C), a C--, two of Just below C and one of Below C.

The main reason why higher marks were not gained is unfamiliarity with this kind of task. Our previous papers and the explanations and references given in the reports would be found

valuable. After some sixty years, in 2012 Dr Neil James, the Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation, based in Sydney, arranged for the republishing of *The New Graded Word-Book for Australian Schools*, by W. Foster and H. Bryant, in which pp. 100-147 of the 159 pages provide grammatical principles and exercises in sentence-correction. In Appendix B of *MS*, I offer improvements to their terminology and strongly recommend the guidance and range of work made available in those pages. It is so valuable to ask oneself “What is this writer, actual or imagined, wanting to say, and could it be said better, so as to be open to no objection related to English expression?” Students, or writers of a company’s emails, letters or reports, can help themselves and one another by becoming familiar with that question and learning to make constructive proposals for the improvement of a piece of writing without making unnecessary changes. Chapter VII of *A Wealth of Words* — see the third paragraph of this report — is an amusing introduction to the repair of defective sentences, and my article mentioned in the fourth will help to alert one to questions to ask, principles to apply, and kinds of common error.

The following notes are not intended to cover every change proposed in the version above.

- a) ‘As a recipient’ is analogous to the participle ‘Having received’, which it would be wrong to leave “dangling”, i.e., in this case, unconnected to a subject-locution such as ‘I’ (*MS* 3:5.5). The slash is better avoided in writing where *or* is suitable. *Split* is an awkward verb here, and, when words for each of X and Y follow *between*, *and* is the necessary conjunction.
- b) The *as* in the original calls for another *as* (in a construction called correlative). *Exposed* in the sense intended here needs *to* as the following preposition. It is valuable to have a section of notes in which one records combinations of a noun or verb or adjective with one or more prepositions. The example-sentences in the *Oxford Essential Dictionary* or the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* provide an excellent resource for that, though one should also be on the lookout in one’s general reading. *Compare(d)* is best used with *to* when similarity is asserted, but with *with* when difference is implied or stated.
- c) As a minimum, some punctuation is needed to divide, after *fun*, the statement from the question. The adverb *otherwise* is preferable to the conjunction *or* for the same purpose.
- d) It is probable that the writer had come across the type ‘forget about -ing’ (here = ‘forget [or give up] the idea that that they should be’). Three candidates made the neat change to ‘remember’, one then concluding the sentence with ‘that they are not cheerleaders for a result they reckon is good for football’.
- e) One candidate sensibly put inverted commas around the words from ‘whoever’ on, as though to say that the situation is one in which you might well hear that remark. Since the writer doesn’t necessarily mean that the vote shows who is right, I have put ‘is thought to win’. Use ‘the case that’, not ‘a case of’, with a statement locution, i.e. a set of words or similar items that could be used as a statement.
- f) Selling shares is an activity, not a time. The comma is inadequate between two dissimilar statements, and should be replaced by a colon, here indicating a practical implication, or a full stop.

- g) What the writer would not have expected is a certain **urging** (gerund) by the ATO. The version offered uses the *to*-infinitive ‘to urge’. ‘Which if they do will’ could be improved to ‘which would’: the implied antecedent is ‘sorting out their super’, which ‘if they do’ does not fit, but it’s better to avoid the relative pronoun and make the point in a separate sentence.
- h) Given the sequence of words ‘don’t have a salad, don’t drink and then ask ...’, with no punctuation except for the comma after ‘salad’, it is very likely that the intention was to advise someone against the usually ungenerous practice of having only a salad as a main course and declining any drink for which payment would be required and then asking to pay less than a full share of the bill. However, we gave credit to the reading of the sentence as advice to ask to pay less. In such a case, and implausibly, the salad would be regarded as an unnecessary side-dish, and the advice would be clearly given by ‘don’t have a salad and don’t drink; then ask to pay less than others’. One candidate gave exactly that wording and that semi-colon.
- i) *Like* and *unlike* require the comparison of comparables (MS 5:3.4): speech in Australia is not to be compared with the United States. ‘Unlike in’ is awkward: in most cases it’s well to avoid the juxtaposition of two prepositions. The point is made more clearly if one uses the expression ‘freedom of speech’.
- j) *Whence* is unusual but unobjectionable here.
- k) The words ‘evidence for you to gain entry’ are much less apt than ‘evidence relevant to your application to enter’: the evidence might show or suggest that you should not be admitted. The form itself is not the evidence but what you write on it.
- l) The best answers here came from the realization that it was not the light- or bright-coloured clothes that presented a problem but the dark backpacks. Two candidates did best with ‘Dark backpacks covering cyclists’ light- or bright-coloured clothes are a problem for motorists’ (the apter verb *pose* had been crossed out and replaced by *are*) and ‘The covering of cyclists’ light or bright coloured clothing by a dark backpack is a problem for motorists.’ Hyphens are needed to make clear that *light* as well as *bright* go with *clothes* or *clothing*.

## Section 2

Here is the passage that Mavis Thorpe Clark wrote.

All three were silent, watching the fire. Betsy had altered the course of the lives of these two people, this boy would alter it even further. Four now, instead of two. A wider horizon for them all — with the older ones sharing the unfolding of the young, and the young following the pattern that was there before them. For Sandy, even the fire was different — *his* fire ...

“D’ye think Mr. Kingsley will give me a job here now,” he asked Jim at last, “when you tell him — I’m going to ... belong to you?”

“If he doesn’t,” Jim said, “he’ll lose his head stockman.”

It was the way Jim said it that told Sandy he’d never face problems alone again. This man and this woman would share them.

“And now bed,” said Ivy, who was always practical.

Another writer might well prefer to make less use of dashes. A set of three dots should not be overused, but was justifiable here, especially in a novel for young people. ‘Mr’ is correct without a dot after it, because it is one of those abbreviations which (unlike ‘Prof.’) have the same final letter as the word they abbreviate.

The work done here was generally good. There were two marks of A---, one of BA, three of B--, and one of C--.

The first aim in an exercise of this kind must be to make sense of every part of the passage. Three candidates did not realize that what preceded ‘think Mr Kingsley’ had to be *D’ye*, a shortened form of *Do ye*, itself an old form of *Do you*. It is quite possible that they had never come across *ye* before. In that case, one would need to say to oneself “The word *dye* after *fire* and the word *Dye* before *think* are both impossible here: what might fit in one of those places?”.

A question one should be ready to ask when there are quoted contributions to a conversation, or other quoted remarks, is “Can all of these words have been said or written by the person to whom I’m proposing to attribute them?” One candidate had Ivy saying “This man and this woman would share them and now bed”. The two parts wouldn’t constitute a possible sentence for anyone, and Ivy would be most unlikely to refer to herself with ‘this woman’. The set of words from ‘this’ to ‘them’ had to be seen as an expansion of the set from ‘it’ to ‘again’. Another candidate wrote

“D’ye think Mr. Kingsley will give me a job here now?” he asked Jim at last.  
 “When you tell him I’m going to belong to you if he doesn’t” Jim said, “he’ll lose his head stockman”.

The first of those two sentences makes good sense, but the second, though grammatical, does not.

A surprising error was “he’ll lose his head, Stockman”. Two other candidates gave that word a capital.

That underlining for emphasis was given by one candidate each to ‘Four’ and ‘different’. Credit was given to sensible explanations. Four candidates underlined ‘his’ or, after a full stop, ‘His’, which conveys the sense of belonging within a house and a family that Sandy had never had before. Two candidates omitted the requested explanation. It is a good idea to mark parts of a section where separate answers are required, unless they are marked by numbers or letters.

Neither a comma nor a semi-colon was appropriate before ‘his’. A colon would be: unlike a semi-colon it expresses what I call “expository flow” and often goes well before a list, an explanation or a corollary, whereas a semi-colon often precedes something in contrast (perhaps mild) with what has gone before. Some writers give a well-balanced contrast a colon.’

Two attributed ‘at last’ to Sandy, writing it within inverted commas; one of them improved that by adding a comma, but it remained awkward as a preface to the *when*-clause.

Ivy's remark needed to begin a new paragraph, as four candidates realized. The paragraphing was not easy to decide upon, but the inclusion in the instruction of "four [paragraphs] much shorter than the other" was an important guideline.

### Section 3

All six boys had better marks for Section 4 than for this one, which was more difficult and likely to be further from their own experience. The passage is of a genre that senior secondary students now, to their great loss, are hardly ever given in the subject called English: what the French call *haute vulgarisation*, high-level but clear communication of expertise to a general audience. The BBC's *The Listener*, to which many school, university and public libraries subscribed, was educative because it published the text of many talks of that kind. Sixth-form (Year 12) students used to have to deal with small volumes of collections of such writing, such as *Prose of Purpose*, which I was given in 1952, and later *Personal Opinion* (ed. Denis Thomas, 1963) and *Ten Articulate Men* (ed. John Stephens, 1965) — the limitation conveyed by the last word of that title would rightly be thought no longer acceptable. There is an anthology of talks and discussions heard on BBC Radio called *Good Talk* (ed. Derwent May, 1968). From senior secondary years on, it is worth looking for such books, not least as providing examples of lucid writing and a remedy for over-specialization.

The marks were A--, BC (two), C++, C (two), and C-.

i) One candidate began 'The word "mitigated" means weakened or reduced.' Better to say "The meaning of 'mitigated' is similar to that of 'weakened' or 'reduced' [or 'lessened']" (I recommend single inverted commas when one is writing about words or sets of them, double for quotations.) When one is dealing with nouns, one can say "'a mob' means an unruly crowd."

To the second part the same writer had a good answer, focused on particular words used in the sentence concerned.

"Cost" implies that there is a price to pay for what already exists whilst "cure" suggests a pleasant outcome for the issue.

However, 'desirable because less costly' would be better than 'pleasant', and 'for the issue' is redundant. The noun 'issue' is now ridiculously overused: it is best employed for controverted matters on which a decision has to be made, as in "The issue is whether we continue to support the Greens."

The contrasting reference to experience helps one to suppose that 'theoretically' must here have a meaning such as that of 'in thought, not yet tested by facts'.

ii) The inverted commas here imply that this pair of words is a familiar one, and it is: consider the common remark in which after a pronoun or other identification of a person or persons come the three words 'couldn't care less'. One candidate ingeniously suggested a link with the actual wording of 'lack of medical care'. The state Paton has in mind is one of utter lack of concern for one's health or welfare, often linked to a kind of despair and loss of interest in things and of any vitality.

One regrettable feature of some answers was a statement that Paton was, in the ‘care less’ sentence, “somewhat mock[ing]” the addicts he wrote about, or putting them “in a negative light”, or making “a sinical [cynical] and somewhat sarcastic remark”. Another candidate said “the use of the inverted commas implies a sense of cynicism, mockery even.” It is possible that this kind of response is to be explained as the result of undue attention in class or homework to the kind of persuasive device by which an opponent is made to seem silly. Paton is **not** using any such device: indeed he is not opposing anyone here, but explaining the grievous harm involved in drug dependence. So often when we are seeking to do justice to a writer we have to ask “What is he or she **doing** in this passage (or article, or book, or play, etc.)?”

iii) All answers were less than satisfactory. The instruction was clear, but one candidate, in his only sentence, repeated ‘simple social misery and the social loss of young talent’ and added nothing. I offer the following answer, related to the two parts of the sentence to be explained. There was no need to name Paton.

There is anguish and often a sense of helplessness on the part of partners or relatives or close friends of the addict. His or her own circle of fellow-addicts has none of the normal satisfactions of vigour and achievement. The district and the nation lose the range of skills and the venturesomeness that young people who become addicts might otherwise have contributed.

iv) The key word here was ‘specific’. Credit was given to anyone who could move beyond the fairly obvious: that school education should include accounts of drugs and their effects, that homes needed to be involved, and that governments should fund campaigns and finance rehabilitation. The best answer discussed the pros and cons of legalization. Another specified early high school years as a particularly important time, and a need for more advertising by helplines. A third wrote about counselling for families, which would offset the tendency for addicts to be viewed as outcasts.

Since young people who take drugs often do so because of an emptiness in their lives, it is worth stressing the need in families and schools to foster engagement and skill in activities that are likely to bring satisfaction, and to invite attention (through conversation in the home and talks in classes and at assemblies) to the question of what general and specific aims and ideals are most worth having.

A senior secondary student should learn correct uses of the verbal noun called a gerund. ‘Cracking’ is needed as the first word of “Crack down on dealers could also help ....” A gerund as well as a participle can wrongly be unconnected, as in “By explaining the detrimental effects ..., more people will be made aware ....” Connect the gerund to a subject-locution, as in ‘By explaining ..., teachers will help more people to be aware ...’, or use a noun that is not a gerund, as in ‘Through explanation’. ‘To continuously intake the drug’ needs replacement: ‘intake’ is not normally used as a verb, and the split infinitive is unnecessary here. One could say, in this context, ‘to continue dependence on the drug’. The candidate who wrote “Paton could have substituted the original phrase with ...” needs to know that one replaces X with Y and so substitutes Y for X.

Here is a list for correction of the spelling: *concievably*, *condecendingly*, *detachment*, *essentially*, *posessing*, *substancially*.

## Section 4

There was an A-- as well as five upper or middle B marks (B++, B+, B?+, and two Bs), and a C?+.

The division into paragraphs is helpful in this section. A candidate should deal, even if in some cases briefly, with at least something substantial in all or most paragraphs.

This time the section was unusual for our exam in that candidates were asked not, as commonly, to show whether and why the whole argument did or did not establish its conclusion, but to explain why they agreed or disagreed with particular remarks of the imagined Doug. However, it would certainly have been appreciated if candidates had noticed and said that there was a fundamental fault running through the passage, the opposite error to the exaggeration that Doug mentions: unreasonable minimization of the range and seriousness of the harm done by bullying. Doug gives no sign of having anything that could seriously be called evidence: he seems to think, for example, that it is enough, for making a judgement about bullying in schools, to “go to the average school playground”.

In response to that second paragraph, one candidate hit the nail on the head by writing:

Anyone — bully or not — knows that if you are going to bully someone, you wait until the teacher isn't around.

Another said:

Those children sitting alone quietly may have no choice because other children deliberately exclude them ....

One may indeed learn to be wary after encountering bullies, but that does not exonerate the bully nor mean that we need not warn or shame him.

Doug underestimates the difficulty for the cadet of coping with the traditional roughening-up that his or her seniors may perpetuate, especially if there is any sign of nonconformity. He mentions “hurtful and persistent sarcasm”, only to dismiss it as no cause for concern. He fails to take seriously the danger of such scorn and hostility, which can destroy self-confidence and led to despair and even suicide.

A little of an employer's time can be spent establishing procedures that can be followed by or for anyone who is bullied or thought to be. “A stitch in time saves nine.” Those who want to reduce the prevalence of bullying are not necessarily “preoccupied” by it. As for cooperation and getting on with the job, it is bullying as much as anything which holds people back from that.

One candidate wrote:

As far as I'm concerned, any act — verbal, physical or otherwise — which [is] found by the victim to be bullying should be considered so.

Better to say ‘is experienced by the victim as bullying’, but then one must recognize that occasionally a claim of bullying may be unreasonable. The main fault, however, of that sentence is that the word ‘bullying’, whose meaning was to be explained, has been repeated. A

definition of the word might be ‘treatment intended to hurt and intimidate an innocent victim, whether by violence or scorn or ridicule or exclusion’.

The word ‘concept’ should be used with care: a concept is a mental object, like a proposition in the preferable use of that word, so it is wrong to write “The concept known as bullying takes place ...” One could say “What is called bullying takes place ...”. The word ‘however’ should be used as an adverb, with one comma or a pair according to its place within a sentence, or, as in ‘However annoyed you feel, ...’, an adverb and conjunction, but never as a mere conjunction instead of the right word ‘but’. “[We] can avoid more serious abuses from happening”? Not ‘avoid’ but ‘prevent’ or ‘stop’. “Your point is ... disagreeable”? It is disputable or dubious or controvertible. We might stamp bullying out, but we will not stomp it out.

One spelling error was *appaled*. After a single consonant-letter (unless it ends an unemphasized syllable, as in *riveting*), an *e* or *-ing* makes the previous vowel-letter have the sound we use (e.g. *ay* or *ee*) in the long-name alphabet. Thus, to avoid such sounds, we have to double the consonant-letter, as in *appalled*, *swimming*, and *hopping* (for *hop*). One candidate wrote ‘all to often’. Another had *exlusion*, *inclution*, and *illiminate*.

## Section 5

It is disturbing that three of the seven essays have been given the clear-fail mark of ‘Below C’. Two of these were by candidates who showed marked ability elsewhere and gained a lower B overall. The other marks were CB and C+ for essays on topic N (concerning responsibility for obesity), C++ for a vivid and vigorous but rather narrow handling of E (educational institutions and the word ‘excellence’), and A-- for an excellent discussion of O (PowerPoint).

The three essays that were failed dealt respectively with B (idealism and realism), K (limits on freedom of speech), and S (the disciplining of emotions). It should first be stressed that what has here been put in brackets indicates only **the broad subject** within which **the particular topic** falls, and it is vital in an essay on a topic to address and keep to that particular topic and consider what can be said for and against any view presented in it. Hence the words ‘remains entirely relevant to that topic’ and ‘balanced’ in the heading to Section 5.

The writer of the essay on B gave no explanation of what idealism is, and seemed to think of it as a matter of dreaming or pretending, and did not provide valuable examples. The one-track essay on F began with “People should be free to say or write what they like, provided that they are prepared to accept the consequences that result from their words.” Nothing of substance was added to that, though there was a mention, insufficiently specific, of one recent case. The topic required consideration of censorship (e.g. in relation to criticism of rulers or governments) and of what legal limits there should be on freedom of expression (e.g. in relation to ethnic groups or religion), and at least two cases where these matters arise. The writer on S did not explore what might reasonably be meant by “We should discipline our emotions”, but instead began “Imagine a life in which emotions are void” and wrote of repression and later of suppression. He admitted that “this is not quite the ideal that person ‘A’ has proposed”, but added, unreasonably, that “it is an extreme that follows the same line of reasoning”. He quoted John Stuart Mill irrelevantly and added, with an ungrammatical use of brackets and a missing comma, “Surely (I for one) would prefer to be the happy fool, for ignorance is of course, bliss.”

There was a category mistake in “our need to suppress [*sic*] our emotions ... is in fact a false ideal”: needs or supposed needs are not ideals.

One candidate wrote both *recieved* and *received* in one paragraph. Another had *acheivements*. When the sound is *ee*, “*i* before *e* except after *c*” (an exception is *seize*). Other spelling mistakes were *hapiness*, *hesistant*, *imparciality*, *irresistable*, and *truely*. *Offense* is the American counterpart to *offence*. Not *it’s meaning* but *its meaning*, where *its* is a possessive adjective or pronoun. Not *describes* but *tells* in front of *a story*. Not *higher* in front of *heights* but *greater*. Not *close* in front of *impossibility* but *near-*. Not *repeatingly* but *repeatedly*. *Ignore* is better than *sway from* before *the fact*. ‘On the other hand’ needs to be distinguished from ‘On the contrary’. Knowledge is not distilled but instilled into us, or imparted to us. (That is not the main purpose of a good education: what is?)

A good exam paper is thought-provoking. I hope that our five sections bring out the inadequacy of any secondary education that does not require those kinds of work. In face of the shortcomings described in responses to essay-topics, I maintain that one vital component in secondary education is progressive experience in **choosing**, sometimes in an exam, one from a (preferably wide, and thus itself educative) set of essay-topics not seen before, and not related to a set book, on the basis that one can think of at least three good points to make on that topic, and **noting** at least an order in which to make them, and **paragraphing** accordingly as one writes and revises the essay. To do that for four or more years certainly develops the mind, and is a good preparation for tertiary work in which one is or should be expected to have and present some thoughts of one’s own.

I thank my colleagues in the marking and/or annotation and/or discussion of answers: Jonathan Burns, John Drennan, Dorothy, Michael and Margaret Howes, and Jim Richardson.

John Howes

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