basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEARNER RESPONSES
AND
EVALUATION OF THE QUESTION PAPERS (PER PAPER)
NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE 2025
WESTERN CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT	**ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE**		
QUESTION PAPER	**1**	**2**	**3**
DURATION OF PAPER	**3 HOURS**		
INTERNAL MODERATOR	**CORINNE WILLIAMS**		
CHIEF MARKER	**SORAYA ISAACS**		
DATES OF MARKING	**FROM: 29 NOVEMBER 2025**	**TO: 11 DECEMBER 2025**	
HEAD OF EXAMINATION	**MS LM BREDENKAMP**		

REPORT 2: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEARNER RESPONSES

SECTION 1: ***(GENERAL OVERVIEW OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN THE QUESTION PAPER AS A WHOLE)***

This paper was fair and inclusive, offering candidates a wide range of topics to suit different preferences. It was designed to accommodate learners of all genders, races, and cultural backgrounds, giving everyone the chance to showcase their abilities.

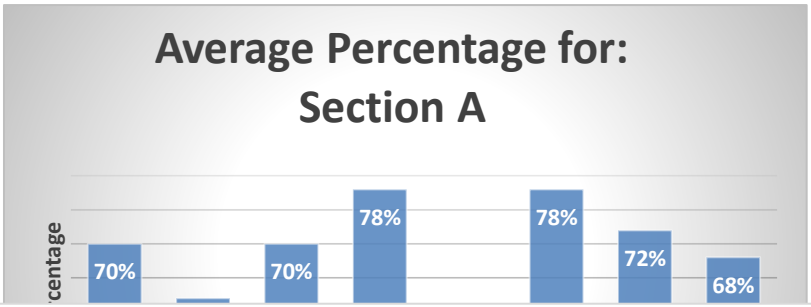
Section A: Essays The essay topics were relevant and engaging, allowing for varied responses from candidates across diverse backgrounds. The marking guideline supported flexibility, as answers could be literal, figurative, or mixed. Candidates were also free to combine genres or present opposing viewpoints.

Section B: Transactional Writing Performance in this section was affected by the rubric, which assessed format and content together, creating challenges for candidates. This section required both correct format and adherence to instructions, and many struggled to balance the two. Despite this, the sample scripts showed performance ranging from satisfactory to excellent.

Data Analysis Graphs 1 and 2 illustrate the average percentage achieved per question, while the pie charts show the popularity of each question. These statistics are based on a random sample of 100 scripts.

NO	SECTION A: ESSAYS	Average %
1.1	A room full of mirrors	70%
1.2	In the modern world, more is never enough.	62%
1.3	With folded arms, plain clothes and an awkward stance, he/she stood out in the room, which was dotted with pockets of smiling, confident and stylish people.	70%
1.4	The language of my scars	78%
1.5	This humorous story is a South African reality	58%
1.6	Stepping Stones	78%
1.7	Coin Flip	72%
1.8	Child carving wood	68%
NO	**SECTION B: TRANSACTIONAL**	
2.1	E-Mail	68%
2.2	Speech	68%
2.3	Magazine Article	76%
2.4	Formal Letter	64%
2.5	Book Review	48%
2.6	Dialogue	68%

Graph 1



Graph 2

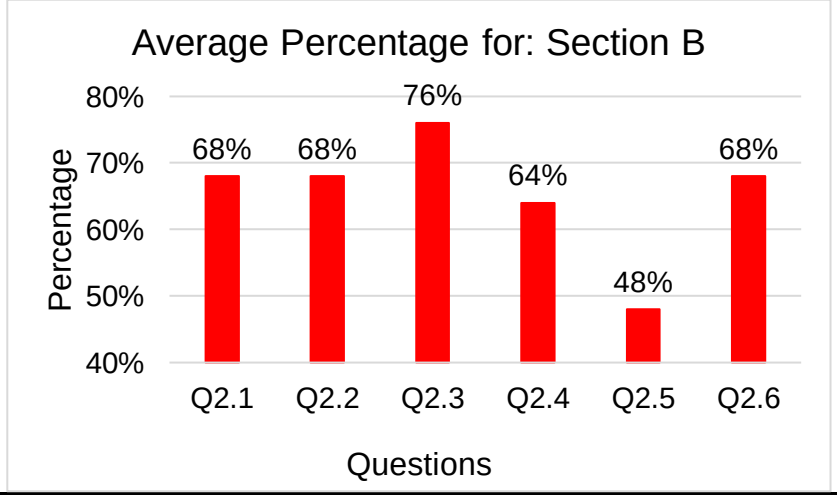


Chart 1

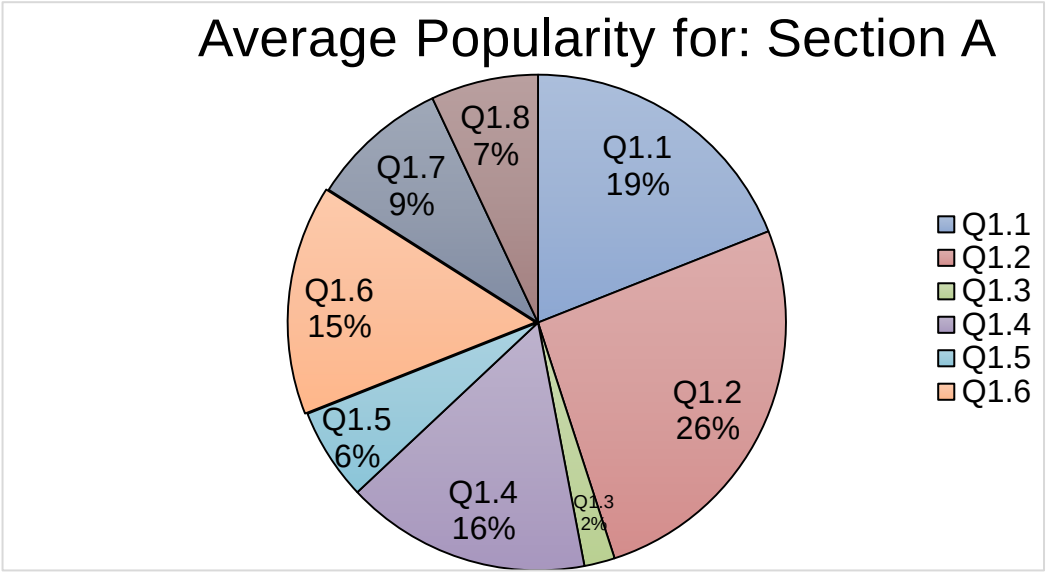
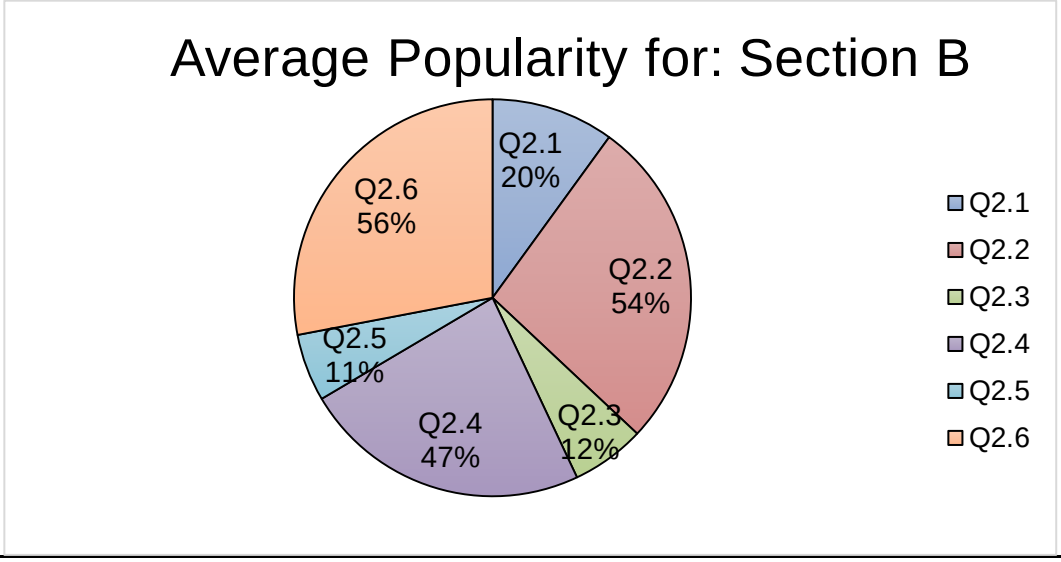


Chart 2



SECTION 2: ***COMMENT ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS***

(It is expected that a comment will be provided for each question)

QUESTION 1
(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?

SECTION A: Essays

The following topics were examined:

1.1 **A room full of mirrors** (70%)

This was a very popular topic that seemed to resonate with the candidates. Most chose the narrative genre, showcasing their story-telling skills. Although many opted for a more literal approach, the topic also garnered some excellent metaphorical responses.

1.2 **In the modern world, more is never enough** (62%)
Based on the sample of 100 learners, this proved to be the most popular topic. Most learners who chose this topic did so very competently. There were also many bland arguments on offer. Candidates mostly dealt with the topic **discursively or argumentatively.**

1.3 **With folded arms, plain clothes and an awkward stance, he/she stood out in the room, which was**
dotted with pockets of smiling, confident and stylish people. (70%)

This topic seemed a sure winner as it appeared to be very accessible. However, responses were often very unoriginal and clichéd as many candidates arbitrarily tacked the quotation on at the end without integrating it into the fabric of the piece. There were, however, many excellent responses, indicating that candidates identified topics that spoke to their strengths and skill levels.

1.4 **The language of my scars** (78%)

This proved to be another popular choice. Learners wrote heart wrenching narratives about their personal challenges and circumstances. This was one of the topics where they often shared their most personal, harrowing journeys, lending authenticity to their response.

It was interesting to read and assess the variety of responses. It provided a wealth of information about the diversity and circumstances of our candidates.

1.5 **This humorous story is a South African reality** (58%)
This was one of the less popular of the essay topics, however it elicited some of the most brilliant responses read by the examiners. By its nature the topic lends itself to a light-hearted look at the reality of being a South African. However, the candidates often missed the humorous element which meant the content could not go into the skilful category on the rubric, resulting in mediocre marks overall. Unfortunately, it was noted that many candidates simply did not know what the word 'humorous' meant.

1.6 **Stepping Stones** (78%)
This was by far the most popular choice of all the topics in this section. Many candidates interpreted this topic literally, but those who chose to respond figuratively, did so outstandingly well. Even the weaker candidates scored satisfactorily as there were few restrictions placed on how they could respond to this topic.

1.7 **Coin Flip** (72%)
This visual topic resonated with learners and responses varied from exciting narratives to thought-provoking and insightful essays about man's relationship with money etc.

Candidates were able to interpret the topic figuratively.

1.8 **Child carving wood** (68%)

By its nature the topic lends itself to beautifully reflective and metaphorical interpretation. Even weaker candidates responded well to this topic despite their often-limited language abilities. Candidates who chose this essay fared well overall.

(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.

In cases where the question was poorly answered it was because:

- candidates struggled to link their response to the topic.
- the link was too tenuous as the candidate did not establish it adequately.
- candidates failed to adequately connect the concept in the visual to their response.
- candidates did not plan and edit efficiently.
- Learners don't write in paragraphs.
- No proper introduction and conclusion
- No understanding of formal writing.
- Unable to use direct speech correctly in the essay.
- Starting sentences with conjunctions and present participles or gerunds.
- Learners write and memorize an essay which they then 'force' into one of the topics.
- Learners try to be "too clever" which means the link to the topic was often missed.

Learners need to be taught to analyse the question to determine what they need to address.

(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.

Teachers should teach the learners to write in a way that endears them to the marker:

1.1 Provide a title for each essay. A title is a summary of what to expect in a piece of writing.

1.2 Use good grammar – capital letters correctly; no comma splices; proper sentences;

1.3 Sentences should have the basic requirements: a subject and a verb.

The tendency is to start with the verb or present participle which creates a non-sentence.
For example: Wrote her exam. This has no subject in the sentence and is therefore ungrammatical.

1.4 Avoid colloquialisms – guys, kids, stuff, gonna, wanna

1.5 Avoid using clichés as it is not good home language practice. ("little did she know…"; "In this world we live in…")

1.6 Use punctuation correctly – apostrophes; no comma splices (using a comma as a conjunction or in the place of a full stop); capital letters where they should be and not in random places.

1.7 Learn to spell the basic everyday English words. (woman/women; because/cause; lose/loose; beginning; definitely; disappoint; there/their/they/they're; *inter alia*)

1.8 Go through the correct prepositions for the correct expressions. Over the last two years it has been noted that the use of "on" has become the default preposition. For example: we must think on…; or she is good on English. Learners should be taught that prepositions are not to be used randomly.

1.9 Try to avoid excessive use of the infinite in a sentence. *It made her to do her homework* instead of the simpler and more grammatical, *therefore, she did her homework.*

1.10 Likewise, avoid overusing present participles (*-ing)* in the place of a simple finite verb. Thus instead of saying: *I bought a new handbag, reason being that my old one was torn.* Say: *I bought a new handbag because my old one was torn.* Present participles can overcomplicate sentences.

1.11 Do not use offensive language or offensively explicit plot details.

1.12. Teachers should encourage good planning techniques – not just a spider diagram as an afterthought, but rather a map of where the essay is going to and how it is going to get there. Also avoid merely rewriting a rough draft wastes time and is often the exact same anyway.

1.13. Do practice essays in class where each essay is written with the idea of eliminating consistent errors. The essay question counts 50 marks – 50% of Paper 3, 62.5% the weight of the entire Paper 2 exam and 71% of the weight of Paper 1. Yet teachers spend no time on getting the essay correct.
Teaching time should be allocated to the art of writing a good essay and emphasis should be placed on creating a structurally sound sentence.
Learners must be reminded of the function of a paragraph and how to create one – (topic sentence followed by elaboration on that sentence only. Paragraphs deal with one main thought only.)

(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments

that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.
1. Section A and Section B carry the same weight in the paper. Candidates should be encouraged to manage their time in the examination so that they do not spend too much time on the essay and cannot finish the paper – leaving out part of, or all of, Section B. Sticking to the word limit will save time and prevent the candidate from spending too much time on the essay. 2. When choosing a visual stimulus topic, learners may respond literally or figuratively, as long as the link is clear. A general rule of thumb is that if a reader is left wondering about an obscure reference to the visual, the marker will also not be able to award a good mark. 3. The use of pre-prepared essays is on the rise. While there is no rule against memorizing a prepared essay, the problem lies in the way the candidate has to manipulate a topic to suit his or her essay. This results in an essay that is often a little off the topic and is marked accordingly. 4. Essay writing is an art, but it can be a taught skill. More curriculum time should be made available for teaching it. Some candidates are very evidently weak in English Home Language, but they have been taught to make the essay work for them and therefore benefit from the paper. 5. Candidates should be discouraged from using headings or explanatory summaries in their essays. These are more for academic writing, rather than creative writing. 6. When writing an argumentative essay, learners should avoid making up outrageous "facts" that are obviously not true as it weakens the argument. 7. Weaker candidates can score well in Section B as this is largely learned. They should be encouraged to read, or be exposed to, examples of the different genres so that they can learn from good writing. Transactional pieces in real-life situations could also be beneficial. 8. Hand out a copy of the rubric to the learners so that they are well aware of how their marks are being awarded. 9. All candidates would benefit from attempting questions from past papers. 10. Remind learners that the use of correction fluid (Tippex) and highlighters is an irregularity. In the same vein, candidates are not to edit their work on the final piece in pencil. Strictly speaking, a marker should not have to mark any pencil work in a Home Language script.

QUESTION 2

(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?

2.1 **Email** (68%)

Candidates responded with enthusiasm to this topic and came up with brilliant and innovative products or services to enter the competition. To do well, the emphasis fell on persuasive writing and motivating why their offering was the best and most life changing. Candidates should be taught the format of the e-mail, as well as distinguishing between a formal and informal e-mail.

2.2 **Speech** (68%)

Albeit that this was one of the most popular topics across the entire paper, many candidates
did not score as well as they should have because while the format is easy to adhere to, many
candidates still lose marks because their responses do not exhibit audience awareness, because of the use of incorrect register and inappropriate tone. In addition, the topic lent itself to very stilted or cliched responses. Many learners neglected to convincingly elaborate on the peace and friendship theme in their writing. Responses ranged from below average to outstanding.

2.3 **Magazine Article** (76%)

Based on our sample of 100 scripts, this was one of the least popular of all the transactional pieces. Stylistically, many also failed to do justice to this type of writing suited for publication. The topic required a scintillating response that would resonate with the modern teenager – an awareness of audience was therefore crucial. A mere listing of tips showed poor style and a lack of detail.

2.4 **Formal Letter** (64%)

This topic was one of the more popular of the section B pieces. Unfortunately, many overlooked the fact that it was a formal communication. They often showed little audience awareness and an incorrect register when addressing the principal. They sometimes veered off the topic of social media comments by parents or even confused the word 'favourable' with 'unfavourable'.
Their response could thus not be placed in the skilful category of the rubric, resulting in mediocre marks.

2.5 **Book Review** (48%)

Learners shied away from this highly technical piece of writing. A good knowledge of the format requirements was needed to do justice to this topic; as well as an element of critique. Many candidates merely provided a synopsis of the book when more was required.
Responses ranged from mediocre to very good. Unfortunately, a lack of adherence to format and register requirements often resulted in poor marks.

2.6 **Dialogue** (68%)

The dialogue is the go-to piece in the Paper 3 exam. This dialogue had specific contexts and scenarios which had to be dealt with. Candidates were expected to show an awareness that this was a follow-up visit by the critic after an earlier published review. Many of the candidates stuck to what was required of them but not all of them scored as well as one might have hoped. The scenario was one with which a good number of the candidates could identify as it dealt with a restaurant setting and context.
Those who did not perform as well missed the point of the discussion between the two parties and also used the incorrect register and tone. Digression was also a common problem.

(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.

In cases where the question was poorly answered it was because candidates:

- neglected to comply with the full instructions of the question
- did not adhere to correct format
- did not adhere to the correct tone and register
- failed to establish audience awareness
- did not plan and edit adequately and doing so
- were unable to provide enough details to be placed in the skillful category of the rubric.

(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.

Teachers and candidates MUST be encouraged to use the resource material made available by the DBE and WCED on their respective websites, as well as materials supplied by Curriculum Advisors.
Candidates MUST be:

- taught FORMAT as this sets the tone for the examined text
- taught the significance of using the correct tone and register, and that these are determined by the audience and purpose of the text
- taught to avoid the use of contractions and informal expressions in formal letters
- taught to plan and edit transactional writing pieces too
- guided to analyse the question so they are very clear about its requirements and avoid responding to only part of the question
- encouraged to be succinct and respond in accordance with the word length.
- This paper requires the candidate to showcase their language skills; language must

be taught
by educators as common errors are found across these scripts.

(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.

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It was obvious that under-performing candidates were not given enough opportunities to practice and improve their writing abilities prior to the final examination.
There are various guideline documents available on the internet (supplied by DBE and WCED) with regards to the format and structure of transactional writing pieces, in which the format differs from one document to another. This is taken into account, and allowances are made for the variation of certain format requirements.
Teachers should:

- seek assistance from Curriculum Advisors.
- refer to the CAPS document and other resource material (with regards to content and format) which is provided by the DBE, more frequently, in order to ensure that learner responses meet the format requirements.
- Familiarise their learners with the rubrics (which can be found in the Examination Guidelines of 2021 or on the DBE website (under examinations) so that candidates gain a
- better understanding of the descriptors and in doing so, will be able to score better in their writing of transactional pieces.
- use the very latest examination guidelines as a benchmark for SBA writing.
- not "teach to the paper", i.e. practise responding to past papers only; instead, candidates should be taught to read and analyse their questions (which are scaffolded in most cases) in order to ensure that their responses address the question's specific requirements.

Discourage the mindset of the candidate that he/she will be preparing themselves to only answer certain transactional categories. This default setting results in many candidates being unable to cope with the content required even though they can apply the format perfectly; instead candidates should be to taught to analyse the question and instructions so that they do not end up shooting themselves in the foot.

QUESTION 3
(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?
Type here
(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.
Type here
(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.

Type here
(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.
Type here

QUESTION 4
(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?
Type here
(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.
Type here
(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.
Type here
(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.
Type here

QUESTION 5
(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?
Type here
(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.
Type here
(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.
Type here
(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.
Type here

QUESTION 6
(a) General comment on the performance of learners in the specific question. Was the question well answered or poorly answered?
Type here
(b) Why was the question answered poorly? Also provide specific examples, indicate common errors committed by learners in this question, and any misconceptions.
Type here
(c) Provide suggestions for improvement in relation to Teaching and Learning.

Type here
(d) Describe any other specific observations relating to responses of learners and comments that are useful to teachers, subject advisors, teacher development etc.
Type here