



Ensures DISTINCTION

in

English language

Workbook

O-level

- 1125 -

Pravin.V.CHETTY

Tel: 57 999 763

Email: chettpublication@gmail.com

Website: www.chettpublication.com

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Mrs W. LI-YAW-HAY



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SYLLABUS DETAILS (1125 AS FROM 2024)

All candidates take **three** components:

- **PAPER 1** – Reading
- **PAPER 2** – Writing 2
- **COMPONENT 3** – Speaking

PAPER 1: READING

- The number of marks for the paper is **50**.
- Weighting: **42.5%**
- The duration of the paper is **2 hours**.
- Candidates answer **all the questions** in **two compulsory sections**.
- There are two texts: Text A, a narrative text and Text B, a factual text.
 - **Text A:** Comprehension and use of language - 25 marks (narrative text)
Question 1: Comprehension questions testing understanding of **both explicit and implicit meanings** (16 marks).
Question 2: Use of Language (9 marks) tests how writers achieve effects and influence readers.
 - **Text B:** Summary and Short Response 25 marks (factual text)
Question 3 (a): Summary task of up to 150 words (10 marks reading & 10 marks writing) testing selection and reorganisation of ideas as well as writing skills.
Question 3 (b): Short response task: to identify and develop opinions from the text (5 marks) **testing understanding of implicit meanings and attitudes**.

PAPER 2: WRITING

- The number of marks for the paper is 50.
- Weighting: 42.5%
- The duration of the paper is 2 hours.
- Paper 1 consists of two parts: Question 1, Directed Writing and Questions 2-5, Composition tasks:
 - **Question 1**, Directed Writing a speech, email, report, letter or article of 250-350 in students' own words. (25 marks: 10 for content, 15 for writing).
 - **Questions 2-5**, 1 essay of 350-450 words out of 4 titles (2 descriptive, 2 narrative).

COMPONENT 3 – SPEAKING

- Approximately 14 minutes, 25 marks
- Weighting: 15%
- Below are the different parts of the Speaking test:
 - **Warm-up activity** (1–2 minutes)
 - **Preparation time** (4 minutes)
 - **Part 1:** Individual talk (1–2 minutes) on a given topic
 - **Part 2:** Conversation (6 minutes) about the same topic

UNIT 1

SECTION A: READING

Text A: The Hike of our Lives

Jeff Brydon, 25 and a companion were caught in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption in Chile on April 22, 2015.

1. When we awoke, the world was too quiet. Too quiet and too dark. It was 8:30 a.m., but the sun hadn't risen. I flicked on my headlamp, unzipped the tent and a half inch of ash dumped off the rainfly. My beam of light illuminated ash falling from the sky like a fine snow. It looked like all the colour had been sucked out of the world. Gone were the orange and red leaves, golden grasses, and sparkling blue lakes and in their place a depthless, dull grey. The lake next to our campsite looked like sludge. My headlamp cut only 5 feet through the haze and when I turned it off—total blackness. 5
2. We had no idea how long this ash would fall or when the rivers might run clear again and we had less than a day's worth of water.
3. Two days earlier, my new travelling companion, Aviv Bromberg, 24 and I had set out on the 32-mile Villarrica Traverse, a few hundred miles north of Patagonia, in Chile's lakes region. We hiked in the predawn darkness with an orange plume of smoke glowing 6 miles in the distance. I had a foreboding feeling as I gazed up at Villarrica, an active volcano that had erupted a month earlier. Employees at the park service office told us the park was closed; recent snow would make the trail hard to follow. But the weather forecast called for sun, and we'd come all the way out here for the legendary journey that weaves through the volcanic, snow-capped Andes. This was our only chance to experience this remote wilderness and we'd have to do it without the blessing or knowledge of the park service. 10 15
4. The first stretch of trail brought wild variation in scenery. We ascended past bamboo and alien trees called monkey puzzles. We weaved through a mossy forest, crossed a ridge brightened with orange and red leaves, and traversed black volcanic hills. We reached the snowline of a volcano and saw no footprints—we were all alone out here. On the second day, we cut a track through ancient lava fields, barren plains and ascended to a view of mountain peaks and red forests below. By the end of day two, we had hiked 25 miles and the once-distant Lanín Volcano now stood 8,000 feet above us. After setting up camp, we hiked a few miles to swim in a nearby lake, feeling nothing but lucky. Around sunset, I heard a distant boom but wrote it off as rockfall. 20
5. When we awoke in the blizzard of ash, we were ready to run for our lives. Was the ash toxic? Would slag soon fall from the sky like meteorites? "What a beautiful day for a hike!" I exclaimed. I wasn't sure what the blast range was for molten rock, but it was time to evacuate. 25
6. Even with headlamps, we could barely see the ground, let alone the trail markers. We made ninja masks out of shirts to keep the ash out of our lungs. Squinting through the grey blizzard, we set out in the direction of the last trail marker we had seen. We guessed it was 200 feet away. Aviv's headlamp was too weak to cut through the gloom, so he stayed right behind me in our tiny pocket of light. 30
7. The red, 3-foot-tall metal posts we'd followed to get here were nowhere to be found. We tripped our way across a field. A wall of bushes appeared in front of us, forcing us to double back. In the gloom, we lost track of where we had come from and ran into more dead ends. As we circled, I felt a rising panic. We might be wandering farther and farther from the trail. Then, Aviv remembered he had a compass on his phone. After 20 minutes, we found the first trail marker. Six miles to go. 35

8. We began to stumble down what we thought was the trail, comparing the compass direction to our map. I knocked into branches that appeared out of the darkness, dumping blinding clouds of ash over our heads. Every new trail marker was a beacon of hope. We lost the trail again and again, but my tracking skills steadily improved. I started noticing broken branches, worn logs and faint footprints, which were now as good as trail markers. In the forest, we made good progress, but the open areas were blank, with no trail to follow and no indications of which way to go. All we saw was ash continuing to sleet through our little sphere of light. 40
9. The blackness seemed to close in around us, and with it, the fear that every step we took was in the wrong direction. But as a Wilderness First Responder, I was trained to approach emergency backcountry situations calmly and methodically. We stopped to think. I remembered a strategy for finding your way out of a maze or a cave system: follow a wall. If you keep one hand along a wall and never break contact, you'll eventually find the exit. We used the same logic to cross the empty clearing. We stuck to the edge of the forest, ruling out every possibility of where the trail might continue. When a trail marker appeared at last, we cheered with relief. 45
50

[Adapted from Jeff Brydon's article from The Backpacker Magazine]

Section A

Read **Text A, The Hike of our Lives** and answer **Question 1** and **Question 2**.

Question 1

- 1 (a) In paragraph 2, what was the main challenge faced by Brydon and his companion after the volcanic eruption?
-
 [1]
- (b) Give **two** features of the ash fall that made it difficult for Jeff and Aviv to navigate (lines 5-8).
-
 - [2]
- (c) **Using your own words**, explain what the text means by ‘the weather forecast called for sun’ (line 14).
-
 [2]
- (d) From paragraph 3, give **two** reasons why Brydon and Bromberg chose to go ahead with their hike even though the park was closed.
-
 - [2]
- (e) In paragraph 3, what evidence suggests that Brydon and Bromberg were not authorised to be on the Villarrica Traverse trail?
-
 [1]

- (f) i) In paragraph 5, how does Jeff feel when he awoke in the blizzard of ash? (ii) Give **two** details from the text to support your answer.

Jeff's feeling

Details

..... [3]

- (g) i) During their escape, Jeff discovered a strategy which he had not considered when they first set out. What was the strategy?

..... [1]

- ii) How did Jeff implement this strategy in the forest?

..... [1]

- (h) Explain **using your own words** Jeff's different feelings after they decide to evacuate. Give **three** details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.

..... [3]

[Total: 16]

Question 2

- 2 (a) Read this extract from the text:

'We hiked in the predawn darkness with an orange plume of smoke glowing 6 miles in the distance. I had a foreboding feeling as I gazed up at Villarrica, an active volcano that had erupted a month earlier.'
(lines 10-12)

What does the writer want to suggest to the reader at this point in the story?

..... [1]

(b) What **two** impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader in the sentence:
‘We reached the snowline of a volcano and saw no footprints—we were all alone out here.’
(lines 19–20)?

.....
..... [2]

(c) Explain why the writer uses the word ‘squinting’ rather than ‘looking’ in the expression
‘Squinting through the grey blizzard’ (line 29).

.....
..... [1]

(d) Read this sentence from the text:
‘We began to stumble down what we thought was the trail, comparing the compass direction to our map.’
(line 37)
What effect does the writer suggest about the progress of the characters by using the word 'stumble' here?

.....
..... [2]

(e) Identify **one example** of how the writer uses language effectively to convey impressions about the environment Jeff and Aviv find themselves in.

‘When we awoke, the world was too quiet. Too quiet and too dark. It was 8:30 a.m., but the sun hadn’t risen. I flicked on my headlamp, unzipped the tent and a half inch of ash dumped off the rainfly. My beam of light illuminated ash falling from the sky like a fine snow. It looked like all the colour had been sucked out of the world. Gone were the orange and red leaves, golden grasses, and sparkling blue lakes and in their place a depthless, dull grey. The lake next to our campsite looked like sludge. My headlamp cut only 5 feet through the haze and when I turned it off—total blackness.’ (lines 1-6)

Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.

Example

Explanation

.....

.....

..... [2]

[Total: 9]

Text B: My Everest Journey: A Test of the Human Spirit

1. I still remember the first time I laid eyes on Mount Everest. Standing in the Khumbu Valley, neck craned skyward, I felt insignificant but also amazed to see the world's highest mountain, which stands at 8,848 meters tall. That moment changed me forever.
2. Unlike a good chunk of renowned climbers, I was not searching to make a name for myself. It was something more primal—a need to push my limits as far as I could. Many questioned my sanity, but they didn't understand the magnetic pull this mountain exerts on explorers. 5
3. My first attempt taught me harsh lessons about respect. Around 6,400 metres, I felt the first warnings of altitude sickness. The throbbing in my head escalated, feeling like a carefully placed bomb ready to go off. My breathing became heavy with each step I took and my heartbeat became louder than that of a lion's roar. I had read about Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), but experiencing it firsthand was humbling. My expedition leader recognised the symptoms immediately and ordered me down. I resisted, but his experience prevailed over my pride. That decision likely saved my life. 10
4. During my second expedition, I witnessed the mountain's volatile temperament. The weather transformed with frightening speed. The clear morning sky darkened to a slate grey within minutes. Hurricane-force winds formed a frenzy of snow and ice, reducing visibility to mere inches. We took refuge on the mountainside for six terrifying hours, my thoughts oscillating between prayers and regrets as the storm raged around us. 15
5. The Khumbu Icefall haunts my dreams to this day. This chaotic maze of towering ice seracs and hidden crevasses is Everest's most dangerous section. I was crossing a ladder bridge, eyes fixed on the aluminium rungs beneath my crampons when I heard the sound of ice cracking. Twenty metres to my left, a massive serac collapsed, triggering a minor avalanche. Had we passed that section five minutes later, I wouldn't be sharing this story. 20
6. I've seen the physical toll Everest exerts. My expedition partner lost two fingers to frostbite after removing his gloves for only three minutes to fix his equipment. I've witnessed how my people's mental state deteriorates above 8,000 meters in the "death zone"—the confused mumbling, the bizarre decision-making, the hallucinations due to lack of oxygen. Interestingly, traffic jams are not confined to cities. During one attempt, we spent three hours in the death zone as a line of climbers slowly shuffled up a narrow passage. Each minute at that altitude drains precious oxygen and energy. 25
7. Despite witnessing these dangers—or perhaps because of them—I would choose Everest again without hesitation. There's profound wisdom gained in these extreme environments that simply isn't accessible in ordinary life. After three attempts in the span of 5 years, I experienced a moment of perfect clarity, with the world literally at my feet. The camaraderie forged with my Sherpa guides and fellow climbers created bonds stronger than family. The deep respect I developed for nature's power changed everything for me. Everest taught me that humans are simultaneously more fragile and more resilient than we realise. We tend to set limitations on ourselves that are not reflective of our true potential. Achievements are not marked by external obstacles but by the internal ones. 30 35
8. Would I recommend this journey to everyone? Absolutely not. But for those who want to move out of their comfort zone and who approach the mountain with humility rather than ego—Everest offers transformation found nowhere else on Earth. Some say climbing Everest is madness. Perhaps they're right. But it's a beautiful madness that reveals our true potential when we dare to reach beyond our limits. 40

[Wendy Li-Yaw-Hay]

SECTION B: WRITING

Read both texts and answer Question 1, Directed Writing.

Text A

Mrs Patterson, Secondary School Teacher

Private tuition has become increasingly common, but I worry about its impact on students and our education system.

As a teacher for fifteen years, I've seen how reliance on tutors creates unfair advantages. Students who receive private tuition often perform better in tests, not because they're more capable, but because they've had extra help their classmates cannot afford. This creates a system where wealthy families can buy better grades, while talented students from poorer backgrounds fall behind.

Students with tutors often become dependent on this extra support. They struggle to complete homework independently, waiting for their tutor to explain everything. This weakens their problem-solving skills and self-reliance - abilities essential for university and future jobs.

The financial cost is huge. Parents feel pressured to hire tutors, spending heavy sums monthly which they can barely afford. Some families give up necessities to pay for tuition, creating stress that affects everyone at home.

Private tuition also puts excessive pressure on young people. After a full school day, students attend tutoring sessions several evenings weekly, leaving little time for rest, hobbies or friends. This can lead to tiredness and anxiety.

Plus, the tutoring industry is largely unregulated. Anyone can call themselves a tutor regardless of qualifications. Parents have no guarantee of quality instruction, and some tutors simply give answers rather than teaching real understanding.

Text B

James, University Student

Private tuition changed my academic life and opened doors I never imagined.

Without personalised support from my tutor, I doubt I would have achieved the grades needed for my dream university course. In large classrooms, teachers cannot give individual attention to every student. My tutor identified exactly where I struggled with mathematics and created lessons targeting my weak areas. Within months, my understanding improved dramatically because the teaching matched my learning pace.

Private tuition boosted my confidence enormously. At school, I felt embarrassed asking questions in front of classmates. With my tutor, I could ask anything without judgment, which helped me understand concepts I'd found impossible before.

The flexibility proved invaluable during exam periods. My tutors focused on topics appearing in upcoming tests, teaching effective revision techniques and time management that helped me in all my subjects.

Private tuition also helps students with specific learning difficulties. My cousin has dyslexia and receives specialised one-to-one instruction that helps him keep up with his peers. Schools often lack resources for such tailored support.

Moreover, tuition complements rather than replaces school education. My tutor reinforced what teachers taught, helping strengthen learning.

Question 1

Write an article for your school magazine, giving your own views on the advantages and disadvantages of private tuition.

In your letter you should:

- evaluate the ideas and opinions in **both** texts
- give your own views, based on what you have read in the texts about the advantages and disadvantages of private tuition.

Base your article on what you have read in **both** texts but be careful to use your own words.

Address both of the bullet points.

Begin your letter with a suitable headline.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing. [25]

Composition Answer **one** question.

Write about 350 to 450 words on **one** of the following questions.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content and structure of your answer and up to 15 marks for the style and accuracy of your writing.

EITHER

Descriptive writing

- 2 Describe a busy restaurant at lunch time **and** at dinner time. [25]

OR

Descriptive writing

- 3 Describe two completely different weather experiences that have stayed in your memory - one that was dramatic or extreme **and** another that was particularly peaceful or beautiful. [25]

OR

Narrative writing

- 4 Write a story that begins: 'I never expected that one small lie would change everything.' [25]

OR

Narrative writing

- 5 Write a story about a time when you had to make a difficult choice between two friends. [25]

SECTION C: EXPLANATION

Directed Writing Guide: Key Steps To Success

Directed writing is a task where you **read given texts** and then **write a response based on specific instructions**. You **must select ideas from the source texts** and **develop them in your own writing**.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

1. Select ideas wisely

Choose a **wide range of ideas from the texts** rather than focusing on just one or two points.

- “...a few responses with thoughtful evaluation **selected only a few ideas** and were therefore less successful than they could have been had a greater range of ideas been discussed.”

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

Good practice:

- Pick around 5 different ideas from each text

2. Write in the correct format

For example, pay attention to whether you're writing:

- A **formal email** to a principal **or** an **informal email** to a friend
- An **article** for a magazine
- An **informal letter** to a friend **or** a **formal letter** to an organisation
- A **formal speech** for a debate tournament **or** an **informal speech** to classmates
- A **report** for a committee

3. Structure your response properly

- Have a proper introduction and conclusion
- Use clear body paragraphs
- Link your ideas logically (not necessarily in the same order as the original text)

- “In terms of structure, **many responses discussed the points for and against the proposed ban on mobile phones in separate sections before concluding with the candidate’s view. While many responses followed this sequential approach, stronger responses skilfully integrated ideas from both texts, juxtaposing them to create more evaluative and cohesive arguments. This integrated approach allowed for more nuanced analysis and showed higher-level skills in balancing and evaluating competing ideas.**”
- “While stronger responses displayed a variety of sentence structures and organisation, weaker responses tended to rely on the source texts, limiting originality. Many candidates made genuine attempts to use their own words, but in many cases, the structure and order of ideas in candidates’ responses frequently mirrored the original texts, showing limited reshaping.”

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

4. Develop AND Evaluate

Development and evaluation are essential to obtain excellent marks.

- **Development** is adding an example or information additional to an idea already in the text, e.g. a viable alternative, personal experience, etc. whereas evaluation is about offering a judgement of the quality or validity of that idea.
- “**Evaluation** is offering judgement of an idea. Anything which suggests prioritisation of one idea over another or dismissal of an idea, is valid as evaluation.
- Candidates may also decide to evaluate the actual texts – as well as or instead of, the ideas and opinions within them – by considering the following aspects:
 - how **sensible / convincing** the argument is
 - evidence of **bias** in the texts
 - how well supported the argument is (with **evidence**)
 - consideration of **others’ viewpoints**
 - use of **language**”

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Mark Scheme November 2024]

- Responses often discussed the **advantages of mobile phones for organisation and research, offering developments such as using phones to take pictures of lesson notes and having access to the most up to date information.**”
- “...there were some candidates who, **despite having selected a suitable range of ideas, did not offer any evaluation and as such, precluded themselves from attaining marks in Levels 4 and 5. This highlights the need for candidates to balance breadth of ideas chosen with depth of development and evaluation in their responses.**”
- “Many responses featured **creditworthy evaluation**, for example, ‘Using a mobile phone provides crucial safety for students by allowing instant communication in emergencies, so rather than banning mobile phones, perhaps it would be better to only allow their use at certain times of the day, for example on the journey to and from school when students are more likely to be at risk.’ or ‘The high cost of mobile phones undoubtedly causes jealousy among students when they don’t have the latest model and making sure their children always have the most up to date phone can place financial strain on families.’ In the first example, we have **evaluation of the idea that mobile phones provide safety, with the use of ‘crucial’ being a signal that this is evaluative. The development provided here is a solution which supports the evaluation by mentioning that permitting the use of mobile phones on the way to and from school would offer security in emergency situations. The second example picks up on the Text B idea of envy, judging that there is validity in this idea with the use of ‘undoubtedly’. The development here comes with the effect of the expense on families.**”
- Overall, responses reflected a high level of engagement with the texts and demonstrated comprehension of key ideas. However, **limitations in development and evaluation often hindered higher achievement. By focusing on critical thinking, integrating evaluation throughout responses and improving the balance between breadth and depth, candidates can further improve their performance on the Reading component of the paper.**

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

WRITING TIPS

1. Use your own words but do not overdo it.

- “Strong responses were characterised by **effective paraphrasing** and well-considered, while in weaker responses, there was frequent lifting of phrases directly from the source texts...”

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

2. Language and Vocabulary

- Adapt language to task. For example, formal tasks need formal language
- Avoid basic vocabulary - show off your range- but do not overdo it
- Use connecting words like “however,” “moreover,” “in addition”
- Use evaluative and developmental language with discourse markers and persuasive devices
- “Some responses featured **appropriate vocabulary to support an evaluation**, with phrases such as ‘the most important factor’, ‘It is certainly true’, ‘I can’t deny’, ‘we can’t completely ignore the fact’ and ‘It is claimed’.

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

3. Grammar and Punctuation

- Use correct punctuation (colons, semi-colons, commas, full-stops)
- Avoid common errors like “loose/lose,” “specially/especially,” “principle/principal”
- Check subject-verb agreement and tense consistency

4. Sentence Structure

- Avoid writing overly long, confusing sentences
- Vary your sentence length and structure
- *Punctuation within sentences was less consistent and some responses lacked sentence variety, limiting the fluency of the writing.*

[Cambridge O Level 1125 Principal Examiner Report November 2024]

QUICK CHECKLIST

Before submitting, ask yourself:

- Have I used my own words?
- Did I select ideas from both texts?
- Have I developed my points with examples/explanations?
- Did I evaluate the ideas (judge their validity)?
- Is my format and tone appropriate?
- Are my s well-structured and linked?
- Have I checked for grammar and spelling errors?

SECTION D: GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY EXERCISES

What are Connectives and Discourse Markers?

Connectives and discourse markers are words or phrases that link ideas, show relationships between sentences or paragraphs, and guide readers through your argument. Using them correctly demonstrates sophisticated writing and logical thinking. Using them indiscriminately (randomly or inappropriately) confuses readers and weakens your argument.

Key Categories and Usage:

1. **CONTRAST** (showing difference or opposition)

- However, Nevertheless, On the other hand, In contrast, Conversely

E.g. Phones are useful. **However**, they cause distractions.

E.g. The ban is controversial. **Nevertheless**, it may be necessary.

E.g. Students want phones. **In contrast**, teachers want to ban them.

E.g. Phones help with research. **On the other hand**, they enable cheating.

2. **ADDITION** (adding information or reinforcing points)

- Furthermore, Moreover, Additionally, In addition, Besides

E.g. Phones distract students. **Furthermore**, they facilitate cheating.

E.g. Phones cause disruption. **Additionally**, they increase anxiety.

E.g. The policy is unfair. **Besides**, it's difficult to enforce.

3. **CAUSE AND EFFECT** (showing results or consequences)

- Therefore, Consequently, Thus, As a result, Hence

E.g. Phones reduce focus. **Therefore**, academic performance suffers.

E.g. Students misuse phones. **Consequently**, schools implement bans.

E.g. Distractions increased. **As a result**, the policy changed.

4. **EMPHASIS** (strengthening or highlighting points)

- Indeed, In fact, Certainly, Undoubtedly, Clearly

E.g. The problem is serious. **Indeed**, it requires immediate action.

E.g. Phones are problematic. **In fact**, they're the main cause of disruption.

5. **SEQUENCE** (ordering ideas)

- Firstly/First, Secondly, Finally, Subsequently, Meanwhile

E.g. **Firstly**, phones distract. **Secondly**, they enable cheating. **Finally**, they affect health.