BATOD

British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People

Language of Examinations

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Contents

Introduction

The main purpose of this document is to offer guidelines to those who modify the carrier language of examinations so that the language used is not a barrier to accessibility and therefore validity of the questions is maintained. It is also hoped that the material presented here is helpful to examiners.

The principles outlined in the document may be applied to any written examination or to the language modification of any text. We hope the material will also help teachers and support staff to become more familiar with the principles of language modification.

The role of language modifiers in examinations

Most Awarding Bodies now recognise the role of language modifiers for examinations. Examiners are increasingly wary of using language that effectively tests reading skills and consequently obscures a paper's function in assessing the skills and concepts taught in a particular subject. Some Awarding Bodies employ BATOD-accredited modifiers to share their expertise when an examination paper is prepared.

Process of modification (example not necessarily applying to all awarding organisations)

- The papers are set by the Chief Examiner (CE), Principal Examiner (PE), Production Lead, Item Writer or Question Writer. Other titles may be used.

- The paper is sent to a reviser who checks the paper to ensure it fulfils the criteria and checks the comparability with other papers.

- The Awarding Body sends the paper to the committee members, including the language modifier and the subject reviser.

- The committee members scrutinise the questions and send in a report on the paper.

- The language modifier has a reviewer status, with a brief to ensure that the language of questions is accessible to all candidates, including those with disabilities.

- The CE/PE redrafts the paper in the light of comments received. The paper is sent out to the committee again, together with all original reports. The BATOD accredited language modifier is not involved at this stage.

- The committee meets to agree final draft.

General advice to language modifiers

1   The first axiom of modification is that a modified question should require the same subject skills, knowledge and concepts as the original question and enable the candidate to meet the same assessment objectives.

2   The whole question should be considered - its meaning and the response required ascertained. If in doubt, the mark scheme or a subject officer should be consulted.
This is assuming that the procedure in operation allows this. Otherwise, if the question is really felt to contain some ambiguity, it may be necessary to offer two versions, leaving the choice to the examiners.

3   Modify a question only when it is necessary to make it accessible. Identify vocabulary that is technical or subject-specific; such words and phrases cannot be modified.

4   Consider modification of paragraphs and full sentences rather than of phrases and single words. It may be possible to use bullet point lists, tables, etc if they solve a carrier language difficulty. The style of language modification should be consistent throughout the paper.

5   Although considerable re-structuring of long questions will almost always be necessary, changes which interfere with the matching of questions to the mark scheme are unlikely to be acceptable. Therefore, sections and sub-sections of questions (a, b, c; (i), (ii), (iii) etc) should be retained in the same form.

6   There are two groups of words or phrases which present difficulties but which it is often necessary to retain.

There are the standard forms of command or instruction which occur in all examination papers; for example: 'describe briefly', 'suggest', 'explain', 'discuss to what extent'. It is not usually considered appropriate to change these. Changing 'describe' to 'write down', for example, would not be acceptable.

There may be a case for suggesting alternatives for instruction words with double meaning such as 'sketch', 'illustrate' or 'present a case'.

There is also a substantial body of vocabulary which is abstract and undoubtedly difficult for many candidates, but which is used in a wide variety of contexts and is almost impossible to change in an acceptable way (for example: cause, effect, suitable, factor, feature, reason). Students should be aware of the meaning of such words (see Appendix).

7   Many examination papers make use of stimulus or source material. It is possible to differentiate between original source material (a quote from a text book or an extract from a letter or newspaper, for example) and examiner-generated material. The latter is not attributed to a particular source or is 'based on' a certain source. It may be possible to modify the latter category of source material but not the former.

The use of a small glossary might also be considered.

Examiners should choose source and stimulus material carefully so that the language within it is accessible.

8   Modification of examination language should not be regarded as a concession but as a right for those needing this access arrangement as a reasonable adjustment. Nevertheless, any suggested modifications may be rejected by examiners. Possible reasons could be that the meaning of a question has, in their opinion, been altered, that certain words or phrases are essential to the study of a particular subject, or that consistency between questions is not maintained.

We hope that there might be more dialogue between examiners and language modifiers so that each party can learn from the work and experience of the other.

Modification and the Awarding Bodies

Two important documents are available both in hard copy and online. Modifiers and examiners should consult these alongside 'Language of Examinations':

'Adjustments for candidates with disabilities and learning difficulties. Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments' is published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).' This is updated every year and can be accessed from the JCQ website **www.jcq.org.uk**

'Fair Access by Design'. Update published in 2019 by Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation **www.qualificationswales.org/media/4739/fair-access-by-design.pdf**
This document provides guidance to Awarding Bodies on how good qualification and assessment design can give all learners the fairest possible opportunities to show what they know, understand and can do.

It is hoped that the Awarding Bodies will not only use 'Language of Examinations' but will also request language modifiers from the BATOD-accredited list to participate in paper production.

BATOD is planning to introduce a new online course which will be available to a wide range of professionals and will cover the language needs of a wide range of candidates.

Modifying language:

Notes on question paper instructions/rubric

1 Advice

Advice should be in the second person (ie 'you') and in the active voice, for example:
'You must use all the information to get full marks'.

2 Instructions

The plain imperative should be used and the number of questions answered should be in words; for example:

'Answer five questions.
Answer **Question 1**, **Question 2** and **three other** questions

3 Repeated Instructions

Even if instructions are clearly stated on the front page, the instructions for each section should be repeated below the heading for the section, for example:

On the front page	'Answer two questions from Section A'
At the top of Section A	'Answer two questions from this section'

Where a paper has a mixture of compulsory and optional sections, an instruction should be printed under the option headings, for example:

On the front page	'Answer Section A **and either** Section B **or** Section C'
Under Section C	'**If** you have answered **Section B**, do not answer this section'

4 Arrangement

Separate the instructions, for example:

'Answer **two** questions.
Choose **one** question from Section A and **one** question from Section B'

The following should be used to give the mark value for each question or part question:
'The number of marks is given in brackets ( ) at the end of each question or part question.'
This should be under the heading 'Information for Candidates'.

Example of modifying the rubric

These modifications were made for a 'mock' Dance GCSE exam for a deaf candidate.

Modifications include changes in timing and procedure normally allowed by an awarding body.

Original version

Instructions to Candidates

Answer all the questions in the spaces provided in the answer book.

After the first viewing, ten minutes will be allowed for you to read the question paper. During this viewing and reading time you must not begin writing.

The extract will be shown four more times with approximately a two minute interval between each viewing. You may make notes on the supplementary sheets provided throughout these four viewings and intervals but you should not write your answers on the question paper.

You will have a further one and a half hours in which to complete the paper.

Information for Candidates

You will be shown a video extract from 'Still Life at the Penguin Café' choreographed by David Bintley and performed by the Royal Ballet. You will see this extract five times.

- An insert has been provided for use with Question 17.
- The number of marks is given in brackets at the end of each question.
- You will be awarded marks for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Modified version
Information

- You will watch a video extract from 'Still Life at the Penguin Café' choreographed by David Bintley and performed by the Royal Ballet.
- You will see this extract five times.
- There is a picture to help you with Question 17.
- The number of marks is given in brackets ( ) at the end of each question.
- You are given marks for accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Instructions

- Watch the video once.
  Then read the question paper.
  You have 12 minutes to do this.
  Do not write anything yet.
- Watch the video four more times. You can ask for the tape to be paused so you can write notes*
- Write notes on the sheets, **not** on the question paper.
- You have another 1 hour 53 minutes to finish the paper.
- Answer **all** the questions.
- Write your answers in this book.

* Deaf students can't listen to and watch the performance and make notes at the same time.

Ground rules for modifying an examination paper

1   Separate the question from the information.
    Weak readers find it easier to have introductory information followed by a question in a simple form presented as a separate sentence and on a separate line.

2   In general, use shorter sentences.
    Shorter sentences are usually easier to assimilate and are less likely to include difficult grammatical structures.

3   Separate multiple questions.
    Examiners sometimes include several parts of a question in one sentence.
    These should be separated and presented as individual items.

4   Refer to mark scheme, specification and subject material and Awarding Bodies' websites to confirm and further your understanding.
    Successful modification depends on knowing what the examiner is expecting from the candidate.
    Subject knowledge also helps to identify subject-specific vocabulary.

5   Choose the most frequently used word or phrase when possible for the nontechnical terms (carrier language); for example, 'make' not 'produce'.
    The 'COBUILD'* dictionaries identify the frequency with which words are used.

    * https://collins.co.uk/pages/elt-cobuild-reference
    Harper Collins Publishers
    103 Westerhill Road
    Bishopbriggs
    Glasgow
    G64 2QT

What a language modifier might need to consider

1   Words and terms

- Subject-specific words need to be learned by a candidate and should not be changed in an examination paper.

- The meaning of command words/phrases such a 'describe', 'explain', 'evaluate' should ideally be learned before an examination series.

- There is also a large body of words which are uncommon in everyday use, but frequently appear in examination questions eg 'feature', 'factor', 'characteristic'. It is often difficult to find common alternatives for these words and they should ideally be taught before an examination series.

- It is within the carrier language, that which is not being assessed, that modification should be made to make access easier and examination questions more valid.

1i   Use more common terms

- 'need' rather than 'require'

- 'enough' rather than 'adequate'

- 'before' rather than 'prior to'

- 'with' rather than 'in conjunction with'

- 'find' rather than 'locate'

- 'when making' rather than 'in the production of'

  The modifier should be aware that certain words are subject-specific in certain areas. Should 'locate' be learned for a Geography course? Should 'production' be learned for Design Technology?

1ii   Ambiguity

A candidate may take the most common meaning of a term that has more than one meaning.

- 'Draw conclusions from data in the table'

- 'Present a case to persuade students to travel widely'

- 'It was sound policy not to intervene in the riots'

Some commands such as 'outline', 'sketch', 'argue' can be ambiguous.

1iii   Abstract nouns

Usually a verb is more commonly understood than the equivalent abstract noun.

- 'protect' rather than 'protection'

- 'complete' rather than 'completion'

There are exceptions. 'Behaviour' is a more common word than 'behave'.

Sometimes the same word can act as a noun or verb. In this case, some readers may only know the verb:

- 'The use of slang is common among teenagers'

is easier as
- 'Teenagers often **use** slang'

1iv Jargon and Neologisms

Certain terms are overused in specific contexts. For example, rail companies may ask customers to 'take care when alighting from the train'. A modifier must be wary that an examiner may not see such a term as jargon. 'Women face a **glass ceiling** in banking' may be subject-specific in Sociology.

New words may or may not come into common usage. Consider this quotation from Barack Obama:

'Like, if I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right or used the wrong verb, then I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself because, man, you know how woke I was'.

1v Non-literal language

Some readers might not have the knowledge to understand idiom, simile or metaphor.

'He had the best of both worlds'
'In some religions it is wrong to touch alcohol'   Idioms

'Her fingers were as cold as ice'
'The two sides fought like cats and dogs'   Similes

'The teacher was drowning in paperwork'
'The key to this problem can be seen in the diagram'   Metaphors

1vi Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are usually made up of a simple verb and a preposition which together create a verb of a different and usually non-literal meaning.

- 'Hanif **put down** a deposit of £500 on a new car'.

Phrasal verbs are common in everyday speech but can confuse some candidates. Some have many meanings. 'Put down', for example, could refer in different ways to an adversary, a pencil or even a pet.

Common phrasal verbs in examination questions include 'carry out' (eg a survey), 'come across' (eg 'encounter'), 'go through' (eg 're-read').

Phrasal verbs can usually be replaced but it is often by a less common verb.

2   Sentences

A modifier is more likely to work at the sentence level rather than the word level. Difficulties occur when the reader has to track backwards and forwards to get meaning, or is confused by combinations of clauses and/or phrases, or when a lot of auditory memory is needed. These difficulties can overlap.

2i   Sentence length

Abedi (2006) suggests shorter sentences have a positive effect on student performance.

Here is an example from a GCSE Drama paper:

- 'Outline the physical and vocal qualities that you would look for in the actor playing Creon and then explain how you would direct the actor in his first appearance in the play in order to demonstrate his authority to your audience'.

This may be challenging to the candidate. It could be simplified using shorter sentences:

- 'You are directing the actor playing Creon. Outline the physical and vocal qualities that you would look for in this actor.

  It is the actor's first appearance in the play and you want him to show his authority to the audience. Explain how you would direct this actor'.

Modifying by using shorter sentences can remove difficulties such as the number of subordinate clauses.

- 'Write down the co-ordinates of a point that is on the line whose equation is
  $x + y = 6$

is simpler as

- The equation for a line is $x + y = 6$.
  Write the co-ordinates of a point that is on that line.

Short sentences, however, are not always easier. They may be dense, using long noun phrases. The first of these sentences is shorter but probably not as accessible as the second sentence:

- 'Sam had to drive a fully loaded trailer truck'.
- 'Sam had to drive a trailer truck which was fully loaded'.

2ii   Sentence structure

It is often best to use simple sentences with a subject-verb-object sequence. In examination questions try to give information and then ask the question. The second of these two sentences would be more accessible:

- Describe a suitable back-up system that would reduce the risk of losing data from the ENTRY file in the event of a hardware failure.
- You might lose data from the ENTRY file if there is a hardware failure.
  Describe a back up system to reduce the risk of losing data.

2iii   Subordination

Some readers can understand simple or compound sentences but find complex sentences more difficult. These sentences are formed when subordinate clauses are linked to the main clause:

'She wanted an ice cream'	Simple sentence (S-V-O)
'She wanted an ice-cream but she didn't have much money'	Compound sentence (the main clauses linked by the connective 'but').

'She was worried that she didn't   Complex sentence (main clause and
have enough money for an ice cream'   subordinate clause linked by 'that')

Complex sentences have connecting words (subordinators). Examples include 'who', 'what', 'which', 'whose', 'where', 'when', 'how', 'if', 'whether' and 'that'. The subordinate clauses created can often by avoided by using shorter sentences:

- How many points would a runner have if he came second in the first two races, and fourth in the next two races?

- A runner came second in the first two races and fourth in the next two races.
  How many points would he have in total?

Some readers are confused by thinking certain subordinators are indicators of a question ('how', 'who', 'when', etc).

Some readers who can understand complex sentences with one subordinate clause are confused when two or more are used in a sentence. This sentence contains a main clause, a relative clause, an adverbial clause and a noun clause:

- 'She used to make a mess of everything she did until she learned that a little patience helped.'

Using shorter sentences reduces the amount of subordination:

- 'She used to make a mess of everything. Later, she learned to be a little more patient'.

Subordinate clauses can affect the normal word order. In this example, a relative clause immediately follows the noun which it qualifies ('plant') and becomes embedded in the main clause ('The plant had yellow leaves').

- 'The plant that was kept in the dark had yellow leaves'.

Language modifiers do not have to identify particular types of clauses, but must be aware of the difficulties that subordinate clauses can create.

2iv   Voice

The passive voice is often used in examination questions because it focuses on the process, not who did it. Readers can wrongly think that the subject is the agent:

- 'The dog was attacked by three men'

In this example a weak reader might think that the dog was attacking three men.

Using the active voice makes the agent clearer:

- 'Three men attacked the dog'

Passives, like subordinate clauses, can affect the word order and consequently create difficulties. It is usually best to modify to the active voice. There are three passives in this question:

- 'Identify two faults **that have been made** in the design of the experiment **shown**, describing in each case how the fault **can be corrected**'.

This could be modified as follows:

- 'Identify two faults in the design of this experiment.
  Describe how to correct each fault.'

The language of questions can become more difficult if passives are in long sentences or are combined with other difficult structures such as relative clauses.

- 'An investigation was carried out by a group of psychologists into the extent of peer group pressure on the attitude of teenage boys to racism.'

is easier as

- 'A group of psychologists investigated the extent of peer group pressure on the attitude of teenage boys to racism.'

and

- 'Describe a study in which it was shown that perception was affected by motivation'

is easier as

- 'Describe a study which shows that motivation affects perception'.

Changing from passive to active voice can affect the emphasis of a question. It is also not always possible to change from passive to active.

2v   Negation

Questions containing negatives can confuse candidates because they may take the focus of the question in the opposite way from that which the examiner intended.

Candidates may pick up the meaning of 'no' or 'not' but miss other signal words such as 'lack' or 'despite'.

Two negatives in the same sentence can be especially difficult.

- 'Experimental studies on obedience have been criticised for a number of reasons. Discuss two criticisms that are not based on ethical reasons'.

is clearer as

- 'Experimental studies on obedience have been criticised for ethical reasons.

Discuss **two other** reasons why experimental studies on obedience have been criticised'.

2vi Coherence and Cohesion

Coherence is the way ideas in a text hang together.

Cohesion is the linking of text to build up coherent ideas. Good readers use cohesive cues at all levels to comprehend texts.

Four categories of cohesive device have been identified:

a) **Reference** These are devices in a text that can only be interpreted by referring to other parts of the text or to world knowledge. They include:

- Personal reference (pronouns).
  'The boy dropped his sandwich. The gull ate it'.

- Demonstrative reference ('the').
  'A new teacher had started. The children were curious about the teacher'.
  (ie not any teacher but *the* teacher (reader has to track back to find the referent).

- Comparative reference ('such as', 'more', etc)
  'A healthy diet includes root vegetables **such as** carrots'.

Reference devices can refer to items mentioned *before*, ('The toy squeaked when she squeezed it'), *later* ('When he arrived, John saw the door was open') or *outside* the text ('Take a look at this!').

b) **Substitution and ellipsis** Substitution is the replacing of a word or phrase with another that has a similar grammatical function:
'Car tyres wear out. New **ones** may have to be fitted'

Ellipsis is missing a word out once it has been mentioned.
'I ordered three boxes but they only delivered two *(boxes)*.'

c) **Lexical** This cohesion occurs when two words in a text are related semantically. This might be a word repeated in a similar place in a neighbouring sentence or a synonym ('Which trousers will you wear? I'll wear my jeans.').

d) **Conjunction** This signals a relationship between parts of the text which might be additive ('and'), causal ('because') or temporal ('then'). The reader has to interpret these cues to make sense of complex sentences.

Reference, substitution and ellipsis devices require the reader to search backwards and forwards to find the referent. Some readers find this skill difficult, so language modifiers should be aware that access to a question can be limited by the use of these cohesive devices. Successful texts are still cohesive, but the cohesive ties are more common ones which do not need a lot of work to discover.

This is part of a Maths question. Try reading without the words in brackets then with them. Which is easier? (The Maths is the same).

● 'Marie had 10 marbles in a bag. It (the bag) weighed 1 pound. Then she (Marie) added some more (marbles) until it (the bag) weighed 2 pounds'

A note on readability

There are pre-WW2 systems such as those developed by Fry or Flesch Kincaid that estimate readability of text. These measure the average number of syllables per word in a text and the average number of sentences in a text.

These systems are limited. Short words aren't always easier. A candidate is more likely to understand 'impossible' (4 syllables) than 'crux' or 'trope' (1 syllable). Shorter sentences are usually more accessible as they often use a simpler structure (SVO) and are less likely to contain subordinate clauses.

It can help to divide shorter sentences if they contain a lot of condensed information:

● 'The Government used a **Jamie Oliver endorsed media campaign** to promote healthier school dinners.'

This very heavy noun phrase makes the sentence difficult to process. The noun phrase here is in object position. Heavy noun phrases in subject position are even more difficult. The further the head noun is away from the main verb, the more difficult it is to interpret.

Although SVO sentences are the most frequent pattern, they are by no means the only one. Adverbials which vary in position such as SVA or ASVA are extremely common in school texts as are instructions which are often VOA.

More recent studies of readability suggest that analysing the text alone is inadequate. One should look not only for the features in the text that affect readability, but also the characteristics of the target audience (Wray et al (2001); Janan et al (2012)).

An examiner should therefore consider the relevance and interest of the question content to the candidate, in terms of gender, culture, disability, etc. A modifier of language could indicate if they see an inappropriate question, such as the relevance to a deaf candidate of a question about a radio play.

This Maths question was suggested for a new post-16 exam and printed in the Guardian on 3.9.2015. The language would need modifying. Examiners could also consider the social and cultural relevance:

- Nine friends go out for a meal. The total bill for all the food and wine comes to £184.75. The cost of the wine is £29.90. Three of the friends did not have any wine.
- One of the friends suggests two options for deciding how the total bill is to be divided up. Either they share the cost equally or those who did not have wine pay only for the food and contribute nothing to the wine bill.
  Each of the nine friends rounds the amount they have to pay up to the nearest whole pound and leaves the change as a tip for the waitress.
  Which option will give the waitress the largest tip, and by how much? You must show all your workings.

Consider why this may not be a good question for cultural (and other) reasons.

Modifying source material/longer texts/case studies

Modifying longer texts requires additional skills. You may find the following suggestions helpful.

Before starting the modification, study all the questions in detail alongside the text.

Read the whole paper and mark scheme (if available) to get a feel for tone and style.
Then you can do any combination of the following:

- Get rid of any unnecessary, unhelpful information.

- Re-organise information.

- Put information into logical or chronological order.

- Create fact files.

- Separate facts using lists or bullet points.

- Tabulate - information is often more accessible in a table.

- Create mind maps to assist with understanding the question and the expected response.

- Use 'spidergrams' or similar to illustrate information.

- Use highlighting.

- Use bold. Try to avoid using upper case letters (words in capitals) to highlight as the 'coastline' of words or phrases is then lost.

- Frame key information.

- Use boxes to focus attention.

- Create headings - 'key idea', 'extra information' to draw attention to important information and give this prominence.

- Re-draft using all the other advice on the modification of language.

The following example is taken from background material for an in-college assessment. It is an agricultural college.

Original

There are two different types of carrots used in Russell Carrot and Leek (*ed: this is a brand of animal food*) variety, micronised (bright orange flakes) and home-dried (pale orange irregular shaped). Micronisation improves the digestibility of the carrot and enhances the palatability by converting the starches to sugars.

Colour retention with the process is excellent which is why these flakes appear so bright. The home-dried carrot is produced at the Supreme Factory from fresh carrots. Slices of carrot are dried very slowly, which maintains the aroma and flexibility of the product.

Both types of carrot are used as not only do they contain moderate levels of protein and fibre, they are especially rich in β-carotene. Both are extremely palatable and the different textures provide interest.

Layout is condensed. Long sentences. Abstract nouns. Passive voice

Modified version

'Russell Carrot and Leek' uses two types of dried carrot:
1. Micronised carrot (Bright orange flakes)
    If a carrot is micronised, the starches change to sugars.

Advantages:
- Carrots are more easily digested.
- Carrots taste sweeter.
- Carrots keep their bright colour.

2. Home-dried carrot (Pale orange. Irregular shapes). Slices of fresh carrot are dried slowly.

Advantages:
- Carrots keep their smell.
- Carrots are still flexible.

Advantages of **both** types of carrot:
- They contain moderate levels of protein and fibre.
- They are very rich in β-carotene.
- They taste good.
- The different textures make the food interesting.

Short sentences. Lists. Keeps the grammatical order straightforward, for example Subject Verb Object or Subject Verb Adverbial. Simpler vocabulary. Technical language kept.

Background texts should not be reading comprehension tests, so it is fine to modify quite drastically as here. There are exceptions. Sometimes the examiner provides stimulus or source material. This should not be modified unless it is based on a source, but written by an examiner. It is important to check with the exam board in this case before modifying. Another solution for source texts in exams is to suggest a glossary of unusual words.

Notes on Legibility and layout

NB Font type and size need to be consistent throughout the paper.

Legibility
Font
- Choose fonts which have clear shapes of letters and numbers.
- Use at least 12 point for main text. No part of the paper should be smaller than 10 point.
- Use bold to highlight specific words and phrases. Follow the style set by the exam board.

Spacing
- Long lines of text set closely together are difficult to read. The longer the lines, the more important the amount of space between them becomes.
- Double spacing between statements or questions and treble spacing between sections helps to improve legibility.

Diagrams, pictures and photographs
- Ensure good contrast and definition.
- Reproduce at a size that ensures relevant points and text are easily seen.
- Ensure titles and labels are clear and set against a contrasting background.
- Lines and arrows joining labels to diagrams can be confusing. A key might be clearer.

Layout
- Consider the structure of a page. Use headings and sub-headings that cue readers into the content of the text, following the exam board style guide.
- Long or complex sentences are sometimes better split up by using bullet points or numbered lists.
- Use features such as bold to provide reading cues and to focus attention.
- Instructions should be clear. They should be separate from and precede the question. They should be repeated when necessary.
- It is helpful to use a new line for a sentence containing a new idea.
- Weak readers are helped by regular spacing. Thus 'align left' is often a better alignment than text which has been justified to both margins.
- Put text close to relevant pictures/diagram to enable candidate to relate the two effectively.
- A question should begin and end on the same page or at least on the same double spread.

Examples of questions with suggested modifications

1   Original

Sunlight contains ultra violet radiation called UVB. Ozone in the atmosphere absorbs UVB radiation. Experiments have shown that UVB radiation kills phytoplankton near to the surface of the sea. This may result in plankton being driven down to deeper depths in the ocean. Man-made pollutants eg CFCs can severely reduce the amount of ozone in the atmosphere.

Using this information, explain why the energy available to consumers in the food web in Figure 3 is likely to be reduced as a result of pollution due to CFCs.

Possible modification

- Sunlight has ultra violet radiation called UVB.

- Ozone in the atmosphere absorbs UVB radiation.

- Experiments have shown that UVB radiation kills phytoplankton near to the surface of the sea.

- Radiation can force plankton down, deeper into the sea.

- CFC pollution can reduce the amount of ozone in the atmosphere.

CFC pollution means that there will be less energy for consumers in the food web in Figure 3. Explain why.

Use the information in the bullet points above to help you explain.

2   Original

Since 1970 there has been a great increase in fishing for krill. Concern about potential overfishing in the Antarctic has led to the establishment of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).
(Information supplied by the Worldwide Fund for Nature).

With reference to the food web in Fig 3, explain why there is such concern over the potential overfishing of krill.

Possible modification

There has been a great increase in fishing for krill since 1970. People have been concerned about overfishing, so they have set up the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Why are people worried about the overfishing of krill?

Use the food web in Fig 3 to help you explain.

(Note: This is a good modification which has kept all the semantic relationships).

3   Original

The yellow alloy brass does not corrode easily.
Brass is a mixture of the metals copper and zinc. The more zinc in the brass, the lighter the colour becomes. More zinc in brass makes it hard-wearing. The bigger the percentage of copper in brass, the easier the brass is to shape. More copper in brass makes the yellow colour darker.

Possible modification

Here is some information about brass

- Brass is a yellow alloy. It does not corrode easily.

- Brass is a mixture of the metals copper and zinc.

- More zinc in the brass makes the brass a lighter yellow colour.

- If there is a bigger percentage of copper in the brass, it will be easier to shape.

- More copper in the brass makes the brass a darker yellow colour.

4   Original

Identify any two factors which you should avoid when you design a building where physically disabled people must be able to access the building.

Possible modification

You are designing a building.
Physically disabled people must have access to the building.

Give two factors* you should avoid when you design your building.

*'Features' may be a better word to use here than 'factors'.

Avoid is one of those words which may not be understood by a weak reader: it gives instructions to consider only negative factors. Like *scarce, lack* and *seldom*, its negative impact may not be picked up by a weak reader with a low vocabulary.

Here it would be important to look at the mark scheme. If the answer is the designer needs to consider issues such as ramp steepness, door width, toilet door width and lift provision, then the exam board could be asked to consider rewording the question to think about the positive features which could be considered by the designer. For example:

What two factors should you consider when you are designing a building accessible to physically disabled people?
(Note: The mark scheme is often a good guide to what can be done with a question)

Example of a full examination question

Original version
There are three main carbohydrate groups. Sugar is one of these.

(a) Name the other two groups. (2)

(b) Sugar, if consumed in large amounts, can lead to health problems. What are the three major health problems created by consuming large amounts of sugar? (3)

(c) Sugar is mainly used to sweeten food. If you were trying to reduce your sugar intake, how could you cut down on sugar when
(i) drinking tea or coffee?
(ii) choosing fruit juice?
(iii) choosing canned fruit?
(iv) making a cake?   (8)

(d) How may parents ensure that their child does not develop a 'sweet tooth'? (4)

(e) A customer leaving a supermarket says that his family does not eat any sugar.
His shopping trolley contains no bags of sugar. Explain, giving examples, why it is unlikely that he can make this claim? (3)

(f) Glucose is a sugar. It is often said that it gives us instant energy. Explain why. (3)

(g) How has modern labelling of convenience foods enabled the consumer to make sensible choices if trying to reduce their sugar intake? (2)

Modified version
1   There are three main carbohydrate groups.

Sugar is one of these carbohydrate groups.

(a) Name the other two carbohydrate groups. (2)

(b) If you eat too much sugar, you can get health problems.
Name three of these health problems (3)

(c) (i) How could you reduce the amount of sugar when you are drinking tea or coffee?
(ii) How could you reduce the amount of sugar when you are choosing fruit juice?
(iii) How could you reduce the amount of sugar when you are choosing canned fruit?
(iv) How could you reduce the amount of sugar when you are making a cake? (8)*

*(Some examiners may see this repetition as clumsy but it would be less taxing on working memory)

(d) Some children like sweet things.
     What can parents do to make sure their children do not eat too much sugar? (4)

(e) A customer says he never eats sugar.
     There are no bags of sugar in his trolley.
     But he probably does eat sugar.
     Explain how he probably eats sugar.
     Give examples of foods containing sugar in your answer. (3)

(f) Glucose is a sugar which gives us instant energy
     Explain why glucose gives us instant energy (3)

(g) You want to reduce the amount of sugar in your diet.
     How can you use the labels on convenience food to help you? (2)

Finally

This booklet contains advice and gives some solutions to problems you might encounter when setting or modifying the language of examination questions.

These solutions are not definitive and do not cover every possible case that requires modification. Language modification is not an exact science. There is an infinite variety of problems and there are always various possibilities for solving each one. Your awareness of the problems is the starting point.

This latest edition of Language of Examinations draws heavily on earlier editions from 2003 and 2011, especially the work of Rachel O'Neill, Maureen Jefferson and Jenny Baxter. Thank you also to Carrie MacHattie, Paul Simpson and Nicky Weightman for their contributions. The section on sentence construction was re-written to stress the influence of cohesive devices.

We hope that Awarding Bodies, past and present, will forgive us for not seeking permission to reproduce parts of examination questions. We deliberately did not attribute these and in some cases could not easily trace their origin.

Derek Heppenstall
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Appendix

Common examination terms

accurate	advantage	affect	amount
approximate	assess	attitude	audience
benefit	briefly	calculate	carry out
challenging	character	characteristic	chart
comparison	complete	composition	consequence
contrast	convey	criteria	data
define	decrease	details	develop
devices	diagram	disadvantage	drawback
effect	essential	estimate	expand
explore	extract	factor	fault
feature	focus	t(he) following	fully
function	illustrate	impression	include
increase	inform	initial	insert
label	lack	likely	list
maximum	memorable	method	minimum
necessary	needs	other than	passage
precaution	present	prevent	principle
problem	process	property	purpose
quality	quantity	reason	refer
requirements	response	sketch	similar
source	state	style	subject
suggest	suitable	survey	table
task	term	text	theme
type			

This list is not exhaustive. Terms such as these may be uncommon in everyday use but can be common in examination papers. It is often difficult to find a more common alternative and candidates should be expected to learn them. This may be burdensome, so teachers could be encouraged to use specifications and past papers to make their own lists for particular examinations.

These terms can confuse because they often have another, more common, meaning. What might a candidate think of initially when reading 'text' or 'term'?

A list of common command terms (again, not exhaustive) can be found in Annex 6 of 'Fair Access By Design'. Awarding Bodies may also produce lists of the commands they use in particular subjects. These can be found online.

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