

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. So he was forced to arbitrary taxation.
2. When did you see your father *the last time*?
3. An Irishman of Spanish *origin* ...
4. A missionary told *of* the need of men who wanted to help the poor.
5. In the *following time* ...
6. John did not *feel as a member* of the family.
7. His *brains* were working incessantly.
8. He was a human being *like* they were themselves.
9. He understood that he would have to witness death *another time*.
10. Eyes which *once had* been beautiful looked at Svames.

The examiner corrected:

- So he resorted to ...
... *for the last time?*
- ... *descent* ...
... *about* ...
- ... *time that followed* ...
... *feel himself a member* ...
- ... *brain* was ...
... *as* ...
- ... *for another time* ...
... *had once* ...

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

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1. So he was *forced* to arbitrary taxation. So he *resorted* to ...

The candidate's version is an error. *To be forced* requires the infinitive form of a verb after it, e.g. 'He was forced to introduce arbitrary taxation'. The alteration to 'resorted' produces a sentence which is grammatically acceptable, but the meaning is no longer quite the same. In the examiner's sentence, the Subject made up his own mind to tax (as a last resort); in the candidate's sentence, the Subject was compelled to do so by forces beyond his control.

2. When did you see your father *the last time?* ... *for the last time?*

In its present form, the candidate's version is wrong; but there are a number of alternatives. The examiner's version really means 'When did you see your father for the final time' (the implication being that he has since died or disappeared), and in this sense the *for* is necessary. Alternatively, one might have said 'When was the last time you saw your father?' Less final and dramatic would be 'When did you last see your father?' or 'When did you see your father last?'

3. An Irishman of Spanish *origin* ...
... *descent* ...

Both sentences could be correct, but the examiner's version is more specific, as it avoids the possible interpretation of *origin* of

any kind – geographical as well as historical. Has the Irishman just come from Spain, or is he of Spanish extraction? The latter is probably the meaning intended, in which case *descent* (or *extraction*, *lineage*, *ancestry*) would be more precise.

4. A missionary told *of* the need of men who wanted to help the poor. ... *about* ...

This is a rather complicated case, as it involves reference to two kinds of stylistic criteria. In a rather formal, literary context, with a serious message being communicated, *tell of* is better; and in a relatively colloquial context, with more 'domestic' subject-matter, *tell about* would be the one to use. 'He told us of the butter which had fallen on the floor' has all the implications of an epic narrative! On the other hand, there is a strong dislike among educated speakers of a sequence involving two or more of constructions, unless they are well separated (cf. my use of *involving* rather than *of* in the present sentence), and this might well cause many teachers to recommend *about* or use some alternative circumlocution.

5. In the *following time* *time that followed* ...

The candidate's version does sound a little odd, without any help from the context. The reason for this is that there is a tendency to use *the following* in adjectival position as a

set phrase when followed by a noun or noun phrase with a very specific reference, e. g. *in the following list, in the following three years* (one may even use the phrase absolutely, as in 'More information may be found on this point in the following', i. e. the following list of sources). But the word *time* is not being used here in a specific sense, but in its general sense of *period*. I would not go so far as to say that the candidate's version would never be used in present-day English, but I should feel much happier with the examiner's.

6. John did not *feel as a member* of the family. ... *feel himself a member* ...

I find both versions odd, and would prefer *feel a member*. The examiner's version would be better with *to be* introduced after the reflexive pronoun.

7. His *brains were working* incessantly. ... *brain was* ...

The examiner is correct. *Brain* is regularly used in the singular when referring to the mental activity or intellect of someone, apart from in certain idioms, e. g. 'use your brains', 'I was racking my brains'. The plural has distinctly physiological overtones in this context. One may of course use the plural when referring to intelligence (as in 'That family's got brains') or to intellectual leadership (as in 'He was the brains of the enterprise').

8. He was a human being *like they were* themselves *as* ...

Traditional grammars spend a great deal of time trying to keep *like* and *as* apart, usually

on the grounds that the former is an adjective whereas the latter is a subordinating conjunction; and there is still a widespread feeling that to use *like* as a conjunction is vulgar. In fact, this use of *like* goes back to the early sixteenth century, and is now common in educated usage before a clause in which elision of a verb or object has taken place. Both the above versions will be heard these days, though the *as* construction is slightly more formal, and probably more generally used. Sometimes, of course, the use of *as* can produce ambiguity in writing, as in 'I shall reply as you did', where the *as* could mean *because* or *in the same way as*.

9. He understood that he would have to witness death *another time*. ... *for another time* ...

Both versions could be correct: it depends what was intended. The candidate's version means 'He would have to witness death on some other occasion' (cf. 'Ask me another time', i. e. *later, never once more*); the examiner's version means 'He would have to witness death *once again*'.

10. Eyes which *once had been beautiful* looked at Svames. ... *had once* ...

Both versions are acceptable and the issue must be decided on stylistic grounds: the candidate's version, with the adverbial placed at the very beginning of the verb phrase, is at once more formal and poetic than the examiner's. But both are more literary than the version which would place *once* after *beautiful*.

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. For some reason the negro did not touch me and *that was good luck for him*, for I cannot say what I would have done if he had.
2. He tried to flee, *like so many others do*.
3. The train was too *quick*.
4. There is *no one* to be seen, said the voice.
5. You *have been* at my sister's yesterday afternoon.
6. We are *interested to know* whether you saw it or not.
7. It would have been *the best* not to come here.
8. All my hate turned against this white waitress who was unwilling to serve me. I must get her neck between my fingers, I thought. But for that the distance was too *great*.
9. Nobody knew whether he was still alive, *or had fallen* in one of the battles.
10. ... and soon people in England realized that help was *necessary*.

The examiner corrected:

... he was lucky not to do so

... like so many others –
or: as so many others do

... fast

... none ...

... were ...

... interested in knowing ...

It would have been better ...

... long, large

... or whether he had fallen ...

... needed.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

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1. For some reason the negro did not touch me and *that was good luck for him ... he was lucky not to do so ...*

I have seen the candidate's phraseology used, but only when an author was trying to reproduce the sub-standard slang made use of by a particular class of people. The examiner's is the more standard version. Alternatively he could have suggested "and it was lucky for him that he did not", or "and it was a good thing he did not".

2. He tried to flee, *like so many others do. ... like so many others ... as so many others do.*

All three versions will be heard in educated English these days. In traditional grammars one will sometimes find rules which try to exclude the use of "like" from subordinate clauses, but this is to fight against the tide of modern usage, where "like" is regularly

heard instead of "as" before subordinate clauses which elide the main verb, as here. The "as" version is acceptable, but it is strictly speaking ambiguous: in this context it could mean either "because" or "in the same way as". It would also depend on the overall sense as to whether the form of the verb "do" was correct in both examiner's and candidate's versions: in many contexts it would have to be past tense.

3. The train was too *quick. ... fast*

The distinction between "quick" and "fast" is often blurred, but essentially the former is used with reference to an object or event which occupies little time, and really refers to alacrity of action rather than velocity of movement; the latter, on the other hand, generally refers to the rapid speed of a moving object, and would be the expected term here.

4. There is *no one* to be seen, said the voice.
... *none* ...

I presume that the candidate was referring to people, in which case "no one" is right and "none" is wrong. In this particular structure, "none" could only be referring to the absence of some material quantity, i. e. "there is nothing to be seen" (of some previously-mentioned material, such as "butter"). "No one" cannot summarize a collection of units; nor can it refer to inanimates.

5. You *have been* at my sister's yesterday afternoon. ... *were* ...

This is an elementary error of the candidate's which the examiner is quite right to correct. Time adverbials clearly removed from the time of speaking cannot be used with the perfect tense.

6. We are interested *to know* whether you saw it or not. ... *in knowing* ...

In the present example, both forms are possible, though the latter tends to be preferred in most traditional grammars, and is a little more formal. In many other contexts, however, there would not be the same kind of flexibility: "I was interested to find out what was going on" is by no means synonymous with "I was interested in finding out what was going on".

7. It would have been *the best* not to come here. ... *better* ...

The candidate is in the wrong here. The examiner's version is acceptable, but a more exact rendering of the original would have been "It would have been for the best not to come here".

8. But for that the distance was too *great*.
... *long, large*

Does the candidate mean "the distance between me and the waitress" or "the distance between one side of her neck and the other"? If the former, then his own version is correct - one does not normally talk of a "long" distance in English, and never of a "large" distance. If the latter, then the word "distance" is itself inappropriate, and a word like "width" would have been better. Here again, though, the adjective to use would be "great".

9. Nobody knew whether he was still alive, *or had fallen* in one of the battles. ... *or whether he had fallen* ...

In correlative constructions of this type, it is normal for the subject of the second clause to be omitted if the tense of the two verbs is the same (i. e. "whether he had escaped or had fallen ..."). If there is a change of tense, however, the subject is generally required.

10. ... and soon people in England realized that help was *necessary* ... *needed*

Both versions are acceptable. "Necessary" implies a more pressing need than "needed": the former has the sense "essential" or "indispensable", whereas while the latter may be used in the sense of "necessary" it is more often used to mean simply "wanted". The people of England are becoming much more aware of their plight in the candidate's sentence than in the examiner's.