

# Would you have marked it wrong?

*The candidate wrote:*

1. It is of *greatest* importance to keep a sober face and not to take part in the following laughter.
2. I must confess that I often had the inner urge of *staying* at home.
3. I seldom liked the difficult passages of Horace and Aeschylus on the same day *when* my teachers wished me to like them.
4. Louise suddenly *got* a heart-attack.
5. I wrote a new cheque with the *whole* amount.
6. And everyone who has ever *tried* it knows how difficult it is to translate a passage you have never looked at before.
7. But unfortunately I did not like them (= the classical authors) *the same days* the teacher wished me to like them.
8. And suddenly he had the idea *to smoke* a cigarette.
9. I was growing impatient *to be lectured* to by a ghost.
10. "Are there such animals?" I asked *interestedly*.
11. I thought how nice it would be *having* a talk with that ghost.
12. I went *in its direction* to have a closer look at it.
13. I can't believe that *anyone* of your family ever had any idea of the things that men have realized.

*The examiner corrected:*

... *great* ... *ensuing* ...

... *to stay* ...

... *as* ...

... *had* ...

... *full* ...

... *tried* ...

... *on the same days* ...

... *that he might smoke*  
(*of smoking*) ...

... *at being lectured to* ...

... *with interest* ...

... *to have* ...

... *in the direction of it*  
(*towards it*) ...

... *any* ...

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf Seite 69.

# Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 57.

1. It is of *greatest* importance to keep a sober face and not to take part in the *following* laughter. ... *great* ... *ensuing* ...

The examiner is right to correct "greatest", and his suggestion for a correction is perfectly possible; but it does change the meaning somewhat, and a less radical alteration would be to say simply "It is of the greatest importance ...". The second correction is more problematical: both are possible, but the use of "following" in this context brings to mind the related usage, inappropriate here, of "the following three things: firstly ...", and this might be a factor in causing native speakers to react against it. The present sentence is clearly about events which are removed from the time of speaking, either in the past or in the future; and as such, "ensuing" is the more suitable word, as its implication of "looking back towards a particular event" fits the temporal context better. A good example of the contrast in meaning between the words "following" and "ensuing" would be in the following sentence: "You must take part in the following tasks", where "ensuing" could not be used (nor could it in my own sentence a line above, of course).

2. I must confess that I often had the inner urge *of staying* at home. ... *to stay* ...

The use of the *of*-construction after a noun usually implies a closeness of relationship between the linked items which is clearly lacking in the case of words like "urge", "desire", "yen", and so on. The "staying at home" is not the urge itself; it is something separate – a cause of the urge. The use of "of" is inappropriate, therefore. Rather more subtle than this is a change both candidate and examiner miss, namely, altering "the" to "a". It is likely that the urge being referred to is not a specific, previously-identified category of urge, which is what the definite article would imply, but something non-specific. The indefinite article would be more appropriate.

3. I seldom liked the difficult passages of Horace and Aeschylus on the same day *when* my teachers wished me to like them. ... *as* ...

Subordinating temporal phrases, whenever they already contain a clear indication of time, avoid repeating the temporal reference, and use a more neutral conjunction – especially "as", but also "that". It would also have been possible to delete the first part of the

phrase, in which case "when" would have been necessary. (For "on the same day", see number 7.)

4. Louise suddenly *got* a heart-attack.  
... *had* ...

Most diseases and internal disorders are "got" in English, but heart-attacks, and a few comparably organic states (e. g. a "stroke"), are invariably "had".

5. I wrote a new cheque with the *whole* amount. ... *full* ...

The examiner need not have altered "whole" to "full"; both are possible, though the latter is probably a shade more likely. "For" would be a more idiomatic substitution for "with"; and "write out" is more normal instead of "write".

6. And everyone who has ever *tried* it knows how difficult it is to translate a passage you have never looked at before. ... *tried* ...

When the "it" anticipates a following clause, it is generally omissible, but the candidate's version is quite possible, and indeed is rather more informal than the examiner's.

7. But unfortunately I did not like them [= the classical authors] *the same days* the teacher wished me to like them. ... *on the same days* ...

This sentence, as number 3, is stylistically very awkward, so it is difficult to be definite about its acceptability. However, if we choose a simpler sentence, the situation is clear. All four of the following sentences are possible: "He came the same day John did", "He came on the same day John did", "He came the same day as John did", and "He came on the same day as John did". This is so for nouns both in the singular and plural. The two versions above are therefore both correct. There is however a tendency to insert "as" whenever there would be the possibility of ambiguity between the conjunctive and the adverbial use: cf. "... the same day, he came ..." and "... the same day [as] he came ...".

8. And suddenly he had the idea *to smoke* a cigarette. ... *that he might smoke (of smoking)* ...

Either of the examiner's versions would be permissible, but the second is the more normal. The "that he might" construction is rather careful and formal. The candidate probably used "to" under the influence of those constructions involving nouns in the

same semantic field as "desire", etc. (see number 2), where this is usual.

9. I was growing impatient *to be* lectured to by a ghost. ... *at being* ...

If we assume that the candidate is being lectured to at the same time as he is feeling impatient, then the examiner is correct. The candidate's usage can only mean that he was anxious to be lectured to at some time in the future.

10. "Are there such animals?" I asked *interestedly*. ... *with interest*.

There is an increasing tendency in colloquial English these days to use the *-ly* suffix on all participle-derived adjectives, even the multisyllabic ones. For instance, the other day I heard "He gave it to him rather half-baked-ly", which is admittedly extreme, but does indicate the tendency; and "interestedly" is quite common.

11. I thought how nice it would be *having* a talk with that ghost. ... *to have* ...

The *to* form should be used here, and in similar sentences. In speech, the *-ing* form gives rise to possible ambiguities, of the type "I thought how nice it would be going to the park", which could bear the interpretation "Going to the park I thought ..." This is avoided by the use of the *to* form.

12. I went *in its direction* to have a closer look at it. ... *in the direction of it (towards it)* ...

The examiner's second version is by far the most normal. The candidate's suggestion is heard in some parts of the country, but is usually unacceptable.

13. I can't believe that *anyone* of your family ever had any idea of the things that men have realized. ... *any* ...

The candidate's version is wrong, as it stands. Rewriting as "any one" would improve things a little, but it is still awkward. "Any member" or "a member" would be better still, if the emphasis on individuals is to be retained. The examiner's version is possible, but it loses this emphasis, and also fails to avoid the harsh clash which comes from having a repetition of "any" immediately afterwards. ("Realized" is also odd. The common sense of "come to understand" interferes with the sense of "accomplished", which is the one required in this context. The former sense tends to be used of individuals, not of mankind in the mass.)

DAVID CRYSTAL

# Would you have marked it wrong?

*The candidate wrote:*

1. The second reason for travelling *is* the holidays.
2. All you have to do is *lying* in the sun and *guarding* the farm.
3. There *was* a number of popular magazines lying on the table.
4. I have never heard that *one* of my friends was bullied.
5. She wanted *to make Joe clear* that he was guilty.
6. The settlers saw that if the houses *were* burnt down, the Indian sharpshooters would no longer be protected. So they began to burn them down one after the other.
7. The parents often cause such a marriage (between foreigners) to fail *by* their intolerance.
8. The young man promised to do *all* to make her as happy as possible for her short life.
9. Through this activity, which is their *main one*, nearly all of them make a living.
10. Joe gets Larry's letter *to read*. (He is given the letter.)
11. *If you want, come with me*.
12. He asked one of us to read a few lines *out of* the Bible.

*The examiner corrected:*

- ... are ...
- ... to lie ...  
to guard ...
- ... were ...
- ... any ...
- ... to make it clear to Joe ...
- ... would be ...
- ... through ...
- ... everything ...
- ... main activity ...
- ... and reads it.
- You may come with me if you want (to).*
- ... from ...

# Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 166.

1. The second reason for travelling *is* the holidays. ... *are* ...

In this sentence the verb has to agree in number with its subject, which in a normal intonation is clearly *reason*. The examiner is wrong, therefore. His correction doubtless results from the direct influence of the plural complement, this being more immediate than that of the subject, which is postmodified and thus removed somewhat from the verb.

2. All you have to do is *lying* in the sun and *guarding* the farm. ... *to lie* ... *to guard* ...  
The examiner's version is correct, but rather stylised. More normal versions would be to

omit the particle *to* before the second verb, or to omit it before both verbs.

3. There *was* a number of popular magazines lying on the table. ... *were* ...

"A number of", like "a lot of", and other phrases, does not usually function as an independent noun phrase: it has a pre-modifying function, almost adjectival in character (as can be seen from its being substitutable by "many", "several", and the like). The verb should therefore be in the plural, agreeing with *magazines* – as indeed it would be if the alternative word-order were used, viz. *A number of popular magazines*

were lying on the table. Note that even if a number is taken as the head of the noun-phrase, it still requires a plural verb, viz. *A number were lying on the table*. A number was ... could only mean 'a particular number', in the sense of "issue" or "back-number".

4. I have never heard that *one* of my friends was bullied. ... *any* ...

The candidate's version is possible, but it would be rather emphatic, with the meaning "I have never heard that a single one of my friends ...". The examiner's version is rather more likely. It would however be more colloquial to replace the *that*-construction by a participial one, viz. *I have never heard of any of my friends being bullied*.

5. She wanted to make Joe clear that he was guilty. ... to make it clear to Joe ...

The candidate's construction is used only if the head noun is inanimate, e.g. *She wanted to make the point clear*. The examiner's version is the correct one. There is however considerable influence from analogous constructions such as *She wanted to make Joe happy*, or the colloquial *I want to get you clear about this*, which might well prompt a native-speaker to produce the candidate's version, and I should not be surprised to hear it. But it is not normal.

6. The settlers saw that if the houses were burnt down, the Indian sharpshooters would no longer be protected. So they began to burn them down one after the other. ... would be ...

There is no need for the conditional here. The candidate's version is quite normal. Alternatively, one might find "were to be burnt down". The examiner's version is very odd, and difficult to contextualise without great emphasis on *would*.

7. The parents often cause such a marriage (between foreigners) to fail by their intolerance. ... through ...

*Through* is undoubtedly the most appropriate preposition for this sentence; but *by* is often synonymous with *through* in the sense "as a result of", and could be used. Some people however feel that this use of *by* has an archaic ring about it, and it is certainly not one of the more common senses of *by*. I would not teach it as a primary form for sentences of this type.

8. The young man promised to do all to make her as happy as possible for her short life. ... everything ...

The examiner is correct. The candidate might have said 'all he could'; but the use of *all* on its own is really restricted to poetic expression and related usage (e.g. 'I gave you all, yet you ignored me still').

9. Through this activity, which is their main one, nearly all of them make a living. ... main activity ...

*Activity* here means "occupation" rather than "liveliness", and as such we may use the anaphoric pronoun, *one*, to refer to it. *This activity is the main one in this area* is perfectly alright. Some native-speakers do feel the candidate's version to be a little awkward, though – perhaps they are being influenced by their awareness of constructions built around the other sense of the word *activity*, where *one* would be inappropriate (as it requires a countable noun to refer to). The examiner's version is of course acceptable, though it is a little ponderous in style.

10. Joe gets Larry's letter to read. (He is given the letter.) ... and reads it ...

Both sentences are possible: the senses are different. In the candidate's version, he has received but not yet read the letter; in the examiner's he is in the process of reading it. (The use of the present tense is uncommon here, by the way, and the sentence sounds odd out of context.) To be more natural, it would need to be supplemented by a frequency adverbial, e.g. *Joe gets Larry's letter to read every week*, or the "dramatic narrative" context would have to be made clear, e.g. *Joe gets Larry's letter to read. He then walks to the centre of the stage and ...*

11. If you want, come with me. – You may come with me if you want (to).

The candidate's version looks awkward in writing, but it is quite possible in conversation. More likely would be *Come with me, if you want*. The examiner has made the sentence more formal by introducing the subject and the modal verb. *You can come ...* would be a more informal version of the one he provides. The use of the particle *to* is optional in all cases.

12. He asked us to read a few lines out of the Bible. ... from ...

Both are possible, with *from* being slightly more formal.

DAVID CRYSTAL

# Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. She had no other choice *but* give him the two pounds.
2. Never could I bear wasting time *with the* Latin grammar.
3. But *in some way* she managed to go on living.
4. If people say this, they will always tell *the stories of their lives*.
5. If we are not careful, we shall find that *we shall have eaten* all our provisions long before the journey is done.
6. He does not see that there is another group of animals on the farm which *do not produce anything*.
7. They got accustomed to many other conveniences which they *noticed to be* very pleasant.
8. I, for myself, believe *in the opinion of most people* that such a way of behaving at school is ...
9. I hope you will do your best *in giving* an explanation for all this.
10. Her daughter lived with her, for her mother was a poor invalid, and it would only be for *some years* anyway.
11. *On the weekend* a great number of people came out to look at the plane.
12. Everyone should have the aim to realize *oneself*.

The examiner corrected:

... *than to* ...

... *over a* ...

... *somehow* ...

... *the story of their life*.

... *we have eaten* ...

... *does* ...

... *noticed were* ...

..., *like most people*, ...

... *to give | and give* ...

... *a few* ...

*At* ...

... *himself*.

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf Seite 289.

# Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 282

1. She had no other choice *but* give him the two pounds. ... *than to* ...

The candidate's version is often heard in regional dialect speech in England – especially in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and other parts of the North – but in standard English it is unlikely to occur. It is not impossible, however: for example, with a strong pitch movement on *but*, and with a short infinitival phrase following, one may find the construction used, as in “I had no other choice *but see him*”. In all cases, though, the infinitive with *to* is far more likely – either *but to* or *than to*. There is little to choose between them: *than to* tends to be used in less colloquial contexts, but this is only a tendency, by no means a rule.

2. Never could I bear wasting time *with the* Latin grammar. ... *over a* ...

It is possible to waste time “with”, “on”, or “over”. “You’ve wasted more time with /on/ over those books than I ever expected”. There are some minor idiomatic difficulties over the choice of preposition, but in the present example all three are possible. “Over” in the examiner’s version usually implies a more specific or active interest in the referent of the noun it governs: cf. “he’s spent a lot of time over those papers” (as opposed to “... with those papers” or “... on those papers”), where the implication is “poring over the papers”.

There are however two other points concerning this sentence. Firstly, the examiner

has chosen the countable interpretation of the noun *grammar*, i.e. *grammar books*, whereas the candidate might have intended the uncountable sense, i.e. *grammar as a concept*. If the latter was the case, then the use of the definite article is an error. Secondly, the candidate’s word-order is extremely rhetorical and literary: in conversation, one would be unlikely to hear *never* being used initially; its normal position is before the lexical verb.

3. But *in some way* she managed to go on living. ... *somehow* ...

The examiner is correct. “Somehow or other” would have been an alternative. “In some ways” is a possible usage, but here the sense is “in some respects”.

4. If people say this, they will always tell *the stories of their lives*. ... *the story of their life*.

In the sense which is obviously the one intended, the examiner is correct. His version is ambiguous, however: it could mean either “Each person will tell his own life-story” or “People will tell of their way of life, as a group” (cf. “If the tourist pays enough, the peasants are always ready to tell the story of their life on the island”). “The story of their lives” is also possible, with slightly greater emphasis on the telling about a number of different individuals. “The stories of their lives” is most unlikely – though I suppose one could imagine a context in which the best remembered tales from the



life-history of a group were regularly recited (perhaps to an audience of tourists), the people thus "telling the stories of their lives"!

Note two idiomatic senses. "To tell someone the story of one's life" can mean to tell something about oneself with tiresome detail. For example, one might say about a man who was always complaining about his illness, "I met George on the way back from the surgery, and he told me the story of his life all over again" – where George is in fact only recapitulating the history of his illness. The phrase "of one's life" can also mean "unsurpassable" or "unique", as in "He went on the journey of his life – round the world in a balloon". "He told the story of his life" would thus mean "He told the best story he'd ever told in his life or was ever likely to tell".

5. If we are not careful, we shall find that *we shall have eaten* all our provisions long before the journey is done. ... *we have eaten* ...

The candidate's repetition of the auxiliary is unnecessary, though it is sometimes used in emphatic speech, where the futurity of the action is being stressed. The examiner is correct.

6. He does not see that there is another group of animals on the farm which *do* not produce anything. ... *does* ...

There are many nouns in English which can take both singular and plural concord with slight differences in sense, and I have often had to comment on them in this column. "Group" is a further example. It may be used in a unitary sense, by implication opposed to some other group, and here the concord throughout is singular (as in "One group *doesn't* produce anything; the other *one does*"). It may however also be used collectively, in the sense of a set of individuals each of whom may act in a given way, and here the plural is used (as in "A group of people were standing in the street"). The phrase "of animals" in the present sentence suggests clearly that it is this latter sense which is intended. The singular use is particularly common when a collection of entities come to be viewed in an "official" light, as in the following: "There *are* a group of people in the lecture room, and another group in the hall. The first *is* to be called group one ...".

7. They got accustomed to many other conveniences, which they *noticed to be* very pleasant. ... *noticed were* ...

The examiner is correct, through the candidate's construction can be found in literary styles, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

8. I, for myself, believe *in the opinion of most people* that such a way of behaving at school is ... .., *like most people*, ...

The examiner is correct, though there are a number of different ways of stating the parenthesis (e.g. "in common with most people"). The candidate's version could only mean "I have a principle of believing only in the views of the majority ..." which is both awkward and unlikely in content.

"For myself" is not a common phrase, but if it occurs it tends to be initial in a sentence, as in "For myself, I believe that ...". More colloquial alternatives are "For my part, ..." and "As for me, ...". One could of course also have "I myself believe ...".

9. I hope you will do your best *in giving* an explanation for all this. ... *to give / and give* ...

It is just possible to read a sense into the candidate's version, where *in giving* means "while giving"; but this is certainly not the sense intended. Either of the examiner's versions is possible.

10. Her daughter lived with her, for her mother was a poor invalid, and it would only be for *some* years anyway. ... *a few* ... "Some" in this use is only possible in the sense of "a good number of" – for example, "He had lived in the house for some years". The word *only* in the candidate's version, however, shows that not many years are involved, and this makes the use of *some* inappropriate. The examiner is correct.

11. *On* the weekend a great number of people came out to look at the plane. *At* ... An elementary error: one says *at* a weekend.

12. Everyone should have the aim to realize *oneself*. ... *himself*.

The reflexive cross-reference for *everyone* is *himself*, sometimes *themselves*; *herself* is possible if a female referent is understood. *Oneself* is impossible, except perhaps as a kind of hypercorrection in very formal speech.

DAVID CRYSTAL

# Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. His teacher went as far as conscience allowed him, *stressing* that his pupil would be successful in writing legibly after some time.
2. He wanted her to have a very good time *the last few years* she had to live.
3. The trouble is how to *find out the public taste*.
4. *It is the question* if in our world of foundering tradition ...
5. I at once began to read the manuscript urged by the wish *of helping* him.
6. The tall figure seemed to burst out *in a loud* laughter.
7. The strange apparition seemed to have *lost interest* in me.
8. The first time *when* we had to read was in the first class.
9. I *have not* to worry about a house of my own.
10. When the Devil *arrived at* Sam, he said ...
11. I see that you are *no* good fortune-teller.

The examiner corrected:

- ... *stressing the fact* ...
- ... *during the last few years* ...
- ... *find out about the public taste*.

The question is ...

*to help* ...

... *into* ...

... *lost (all) its interest* ...

... *(that)* ...

... *don't have to* ...

... *came up to* ...

... *not a* ...

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf Seite 397.

# Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 390.

1. His teacher went as far as conscience allowed him, *stressing* that his pupil would be successful in writing legibly after some time. ... *stressing the fact* ...

Both versions are acceptable. It is not necessary to state what is being stressed, as the examiner has decided to do, and his choice of "the fact" is but one possibility amongst many, e.g. "stressing the point/idea /view ...".

2. He wanted her to have a very good time *the last few years* she had to live. ... *during the last few years* ...

The examiner is right to make some correction. In some literary styles, one occasionally sees the preposition omitted from this kind of time phrase, and the adverbial phrase of time in *initial* position in sentences is often used without it (e.g. "The last few years, I've lived in London"); but in final position in most varieties of English speech and writing, it is normal to include a preposition – either "during" or "for".

3. The trouble is how to *find out the public taste*. ... *find out about the public taste*.

"Public taste /opinion ..." is usually used without an article, e.g. "Let's discover public opinion on the matter", "Public taste is divided", and this modification applies to both candidate's and examiner's versions. Having said this, both versions are then possible. There is a slight difference in specificity between the two verb phrases, of course, "find out about" being less determinate than "find out"; and because "public taste" is not a particularly specific phenomenon, it is the form with "about" that is the more likely everyday usage.

4. *It is the question* if in our world of foundering tradition ... *The question is* ... The examiner is correct. The candidate's version is not possible. A rather more formal alternative would have been "It is in question ...".

5. I at once began to read the manuscript, urged by the wish *of helping* him. ... *to help* ...

The "of + -ing" construction following a noun results in a nominal interpretation for the "-ing" form (e.g. "I have a fear of walking"), whereas here it is a verbal phrase

which is clearly required. The examiner is correct.

6. The tall figure seemed to burst out *in a loud laughter*. ... *into* ...

"Laughter" is an uncountable noun, and the indefinite article is inappropriate. The verb "burst" is usually used with directional prepositions, "into" being particularly common. One may burst out in spots, sometimes, but not in laughter.

7. The strange apparition seemed to have *lost interest* in me. ... *lost (all) its interest* ...

Both versions are possible, with no obvious difference in meaning. The addition of "all" is optional, adding greater emphasis.

8. The first time *when we had to read* was in the first class. ... (*that*) ...

The most common usage here is to omit the subordinating conjunction altogether, as signalled by the brackets in the examiner's version; but if one is expressed, it must be "that".

9. I *have not to worry* about a house of my own. ... *don't have to* ...

The examiner's version is the normal one. The candidate's would only be used (a) with a strong stress on "not", and usually a contraction of the verb (e.g. "You've *not to worry* ..."), or (b), less commonly, with a contracted form of the negative (e.g. "Tell him he hasn't to worry about anything"). Putting "have" and "not" together, both uncontracted and stressed, produces a rather awkward-sounding construction, though not an impossible one.

10. When the Devil *arrived at* Sam, he said ... *came up to* ...

"Arrive at" normally implies a complement of place or result ("to arrive at the house", "to arrive at the answer"), and the candidate's version is accordingly most unlikely. A better equivalent for the examiner would have been "reached".

11. I see that you are *no good* fortune-teller. ... *not a* ...

The examiner's version is normal. "No" may however be used with a noun, but usually only in a rhetorical or dramatic context, e.g. "You're no fortune-teller". (Introducing an adjective, as in the candidate's version, considerably reduces the probability of this happening.)

DAVID CRYSTAL