

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. They stood *on* the side of the road.
2. Suddenly I became angry *to stand here at* the river.
3. They were *in* a distance of 350 to 400 yards.
4. Another thing they have to counteract *is* the lies of Moses, the tame raven.
5. There *was* the kind of headlines you always find in popular magazines.
6. *At* their last attack the Indians concentrated all their forces on one point.
7. The young man gave her *the wished money*.
8. He had tried to live *differently* than before.
9. Larry told Joe *through* the letter that he ...
10. It *simply* was inborn.
11. In a block of flats you have to live together with several families *which* you cannot choose.

The examiner corrected:

... *at* ...

... *at standing there by/near* ...

... *at* ...

... *are* ...

... *were* ...

In ...

... *the money she had wished*.

... *in another way* ...

... *in* ...

... *was simply* ...

... *whom/that* ...

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf S. 60.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 53.

1. They stood *on* the side of the road.
... *at* ...

The difference between “on the side of the house” and “at the side of the house” is clear: the former means that something is attached to or marked on the wall of the building; the latter means that something is in close proximity to the wall, but not necessarily in contact with it. “On” in its sense of spatial position usually requires that the object which it governs has specific physical dimensions; and the trouble with words like “side” and “top” is that their meaning is vague – sometimes they can have a specific meaning and sometimes not. “The side of the road” is not usually meant to refer to a particular, well-defined area, set off distinctively from the road as such: if it did, then “on” would be permissible (“Go and stand on the side of the road”; cf. “Go and stand on the pavement”, where **“at the pavement”* is not possible). But in the present example, doubtless nothing more than a general sense is intended – the people were standing somewhere adjacent to the road – in which case “at” is the appropriate preposition.

2. Suddenly I became angry *to stand here at* the river. ... *at standing there by/near* ...
One is angry *at* something or *with* someone, and the “-ing” form of the verb is thus

needed to follow the preposition, in the normal way. While some adjectives may take “to” (e.g. anxious, stupid, eager, easy), angry is not one of these. The examiner’s switch from “here” to “there” is unnecessary: either adverb could be used. “By” is certainly a better preposition than “at”. “At” would imply seeing the river as a single, specific place (“Meet you at the river at eight o’clock” – cf. No. 1 above), whereas clearly what is wanted here is the sense of “alongside”.

3. They were *in* a distance of 350 to 400 yards. ... *at* ...

“At” is the normal preposition used to refer to specific positions along a scale of any kind (e.g. speed, temperature, distance). The candidate’s version is not possible. (But note that when “distance” has a general sense, with obligatory “the”, “in” may be used: “We saw him in the distance”.)

4. Another thing they have to counteract *is* the lies of Moses, the tame raven. ... *are* ...
Normally there is number concord between subject and complement in English, but there are exceptions, e.g. “Good answers are always a surprise”. In sentences which have a summarising subject-phrase, there is a regular possibility of having a complement in either the singular or the plural. If the subject lacks number contrast, there is no problem: one

may hear both "What I want is the answers" and "... are the answers", the difference being one of point of view. Is the speaker seeing "the answers" as a collective unit (in which case the singular verb is appropriate) or as an aggregate of separate items (in which case the plural verb is appropriate)? The same summarizing sense applies in the present example (though because "thing" does allow number contrast, the usage sounds a little less natural). "Another point is his lies", someone might say. This is in fact a much more preferable form than "Another point are his lies", which is an unacceptable sentence to most people. But once the singular subject is distanced from the verb - for instance, by a relative clause, as here - then the proximity of the following noun exercises considerable influence. "Are" therefore sounds more natural to many people in sentences of this type, and may certainly be found.

5. There *was* the kind of headlines you always find in popular magazines. ... *were* ... "There" is presumably the "empty", "weak" use of this word, and not the adverbial of place (the contrast being seen in "There were many people there"). As in No. 4, the singular verb plus plural complement is possible. "There was the headlines" means "the phenomenon of the headlines"; "There were the headlines" means "the collection of different headlines". "Kind of" suggests the collective sense, and the candidate's sentence is thus possible. But again, as in 4, the proximity of the plural noun to the verb, with only the vague "kind of" in between, makes the plural verb more natural.

6. *At* their last attack the Indians concentrated all their forces on one point. *In* ... "Attack" here cannot mean a single specific point in time or place: it has a sense of duration, and "in" (or "during") is necessary.

7. The young man gave her *the wished money*. ... *the money she had wished*.

Collocations with "desired" are acceptable in an attributive construction ("We received the desired answer"), but "wished", like "wanted", is not normally possible. The examiner's version is not very natural either, however, as the specific sense of "wish" ("to make a wish") interferes with its general sense (of "want"), which is the one required in this context. Both candidate and examiner would have produced better sentences if they had introduced the word "for" after the verb -

but "the wished-for money", while sometimes used, is by no means as normal as "the money she had wished for".

8. He had tried to live *differently* than before. ... *in another way* ...

There is nothing wrong with the candidate's use of the word *differently* here. The examiner's substitution is no improvement, and indeed is rather more awkward.

9. Larry told Joe *through* the letter that he *in* ...

Both are possible. "Through" here would mean "by means of"; "in" means "as part of the content of".

10. It *simply was* inborn. ... *was simply* ... "Simply", in its intensifying sense of "merely", would normally occur before the adjective in writing; but in speech, in addition to this position, it may be used before the verb, as the stress is sufficient to make the structural link (cf. "I only saw John" in speech, meaning "It was John only whom I saw"). The examiner's version is certainly clearer, in this example. (Note the contrasts between "He simply told the story" (= "All that he did was tell the story"), "He told the story simply" (= "He told it in a plain manner"), and "He told the story, simply" (which may be either, depending on intonation).)

11. In a block of flats you have to live together with several families *which* you cannot choose. ... *whom/that* ...

"Family" is a noun that can be construed in the sense of an aggregate of individual people ("The family are coming to dinner") or of a collective unit ("The family is coming to dinner"). (Compare Nos. 4 and 5.) Seen as a set of individuals, the personal relative pronoun would be appropriate ("There are two delightful families who live in that house"); seen as a collective unit, with less "personality", the non-personal pronoun is possible ("There were many families which were living there at that time"). In the present example, the problem expressed by the sentence is obviously one of personal relationships, and so the personal pronoun, "whom", would be the appropriate one to use. Note that the grammatical problem can be avoided altogether by using "that" with a restrictive relative clause ("that" may be used with both personal and non-personal antecedents), or, of course, by omitting the pronoun.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. In the initial passage there *stands* the sentence ...
2. She danced *up to* five o'clock in the morning.
3. They would have no need *for fearing* him any longer.
4. One might think he *has* seen a ghost.
5. This contrast produced in him a feeling which he describes *with* being pulled two different ways.
6. *Travelling nowadays takes place* for other reasons.
7. I have nothing to do *except to watch over* the possessions of my master.
8. The expression *of* the man's face suddenly changed.
9. *But this thought* Old Major did not think to an end.
10. She knows his inability *for* certain things.
11. They meet *new* people and see *new* towns and *new* countries.
12. They travelled from now on *by* their own car.
13. My teacher went so far as to write *into* my report ...
14. It is a great advantage to live in a house of *your* own.
15. His business was *running* so well that ...

The examiner corrected:

... is ...

... till ...

... to fear ...

... had ...

... as ...

People nowadays travel ...

... except watch over ...

... on ...

But this was a thought that ...

... to do ...

... other ... other ... other ...

... in ...

... in ...

... one's ...

... doing ...

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 156.

1. In the initial passage there *stands* the sentence *is* ...

Interference from German has caused the candidate to produce this unacceptable sentence. English can sometimes use “stand” to replace “be” in markedly rhetorical or dramatic contexts (e.g. “There stands a man who has seen many wars”), but usually only of objects that stand upright.

2. She danced *up to* five o'clock in the morning. ... *till* ...

The candidate's version can be heard in colloquial speech; but with a clear time-reference in the context, the more appropriate prepositions would be the temporal ones, *until* and *till*. What seems to be happening here is that *up to* is being used as a single, complex prepositional unit: it is not possible to omit the *up*, for instance (“*She danced to 5 o'clock”). This is therefore a different use of *up* from its intensifying use before *until*, where it is optional (“She danced (up) until 5 o'clock”).

3. They would have no need *for fearing* him any longer. ... *to fear* ...

The examiner is correct. The candidate's use is probably influenced by the construction where *need* is followed by a noun, when *for* is possible, e.g. “There is a need for restraint”.

4. One might think he *has* seen a ghost. ... *had* ...

The issue here is one of sequence of tenses: the problem is to decide what “tense” *might* belongs to – or, more specifically, what time-relationship it expresses. Modern grammars are agreed that there is far more to *might* than saying simply that it is the “past tense of *may*”. The switch from *may* to *might* is hardly ever a switch from present to past time. The main sense involved is one of tentativeness and possibility, especially when the word is stressed: there is usually a future orientation to the time, therefore, which will allow sentences such as the following: “If you go to that castle, you might think you would see a ghost, but you would be wrong”. If a habitual sense is involved, then it would be normal to keep the reported verb in the past, as in: “Every day, when you came out of the cinema in the late evening, you might think you were walking down a street in Africa, it was so warm.” And if a clear past sense is involved, then the reported tense would be a remove further back in the past, as one would expect, as in: “You might think he had seen a ghost” – in which case the examiner is correct. But note that one would be more likely to hear “You might have thought” here. The candidate's version could only be used in a context where the speaker is addressing someone who thinks he has just seen a ghost: he might have said,

"You might think you have seen a ghost, but you haven't", where *might think* means "it is possible that you are in the process of thinking".

5. This contrast produced in him a feeling which he describes *with* being pulled two different ways. ... *as* ...

The examiner is correct: *as* is required. Perhaps the candidate was getting confused with *compare*, where *with* would be normal.

6. *Travelling nowadays takes place* for other reasons. *People nowadays travel* ...

There is no reason why *travelling* should not be used in the general sense of "the activity of travelling", and used as subject. The examiner's correction is slightly more succinct, but unnecessary.

7. I have nothing to do *except to* watch over the possessions of my master. ... *except* ... *Except*, along with other conjunctions expressing exception (*apart from, but*), does not use the particle *to* when followed by an infinitival construction. The conjunction *but* sometimes permits this, as in: "There is nothing else to do but to stay here", where "... but stay here" is also possible, and rather more usual.

8. The expression *of* the man's face suddenly changed. ... *on* ...

Expression of indicates the act of expressing in words or other actions, e.g. "the expression of his opinions / feelings ...". *Expression in or on* refers more to the formal characteristics of an object involved in the activity of expressing, such as "the expression in his poetry" or "the expression on his face" (where *in* is sometimes possible). The examiner's version is clearly the correct one here.

9. *But this thought* Old Major did not think to an end. *But this was a thought that* ...

This is a rather strange idea, whatever syntax one uses to express it! Presumably the sentence means that Old Major did not logically work through the implications of the idea that came into his head. If this is so, then both versions are possible. The end of the sentence is awkwardly put, however. Rather better would be to use a more explicit verb, such as *think through* or *think out*, and to replace *end* by *conclusion*.

10. She knows his inability *for* certain things. ... *to do* ...

The notion of (*in*)ability implies the operation of a specific (mental or physical) activity.

A sentence in which a particular kind of ability was mentioned would thus seem anomalous if no further specification was given, and this is why the candidate's version sounds odd. If a specific activity were provided, then both *for* and *in* could be used, depending on the sense, e.g. "He has a marvellous ability for asking the wrong questions", "He has great ability in mathematics". The examiner has tried to make the sentence more definite by substituting an infinitive, and his version is much better. But the basic semantic difficulty remains.

11. They meet *new* people and see *new* towns and *new* countries. ... *other* ... *other* ... *other* ...

There is nothing wrong with the candidate's sentence. The examiner's is hardly an improvement.

12. They travelled from now on *by* their own car. ... *in* ...

By car is an idiomatic structure, with very little flexibility for alteration: one may not have **by cars*, **by a car* or **by expensive car*, for instance, in normal English. As soon as one introduces qualifications for the noun, one loses the abstract sense of 'car' involved in the idiom, and the physical object becomes the dominant referent. Literal uses of prepositions are required (e.g. *in, with*), and the examiner is therefore correct.

13. My teacher went so far as to write *into* my report. ... *in* ...

The examiner is right: one writes *in* or *on* a report. One may of course *write something into* a report, i.e. add something to it; but that would be a more radical alteration to the sentence than is necessary.

14. It is a great advantage to live in a house of *your* own. ... *one's* ...

Both are possible. The candidate's version is much more colloquial than the rather formal version of the examiner.

15. His business was *running* so well that ... *doing* ...

The idiom "to run a business" is not regularly used in this way, but the candidate's version is not a surprising extension of the normal pattern, and native speakers do not find it odd. The examiner has provided a more familiar usage. A further common verb is "going".

DAVID CRYSTAL

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. He was glad to be back at home *and that* his father was still alive.
2. And now *to painting*.
3. In my opinion we must beware of the common mistake *to judge* everything *from* its usefulness.
4. By the light of the match the policeman saw an energetic face with a little scar *over* the left eye.
5. It was just some minutes *before* ten o'clock when he came back.
6. Bob took the little piece of paper that the policeman had *given to him*.
7. We agreed to come here after twenty years even if we *had to travel* thousands of miles.
8. He is the truest friend *I ever had*.
9. She *has lived* in London since 1953.
10. This is the red tweed suit which Sir Henry *gave Barrymore* last week.
11. He took the two pounds and gave *them* to him.

The examiner corrected:

... *and to see that* ...

... *let's talk (let's come to talk / speak) about painting*.

... *of judging ... by ...*

... *above ...*

... *to ...*

... *given him ...*

... *would have to travel ...*

... *I've ever had*.

... *has been living ...*

... *gave to Barrymore ...*

... *it / the money ...*

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf S. 407f.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche S. 400.

1. He was glad to be back at home *and that* his father was still alive. ... *and to see that* ...

English has a very strong tendency to maintain parallelism of clause structure when clauses are conjoined and ellipsis has taken place. The present sentence, in its "full" form, would be: "He was glad to be back at home and he was glad that his father was still alive". The elision usually produces a parallel *that*-construction ("He was glad that he was back at home and that ...") or a parallel infinitival construction (which is the solution

that the examiner has adopted). The candidate's version, as it stands, is stylistically very awkward. Loose constructions of this kind are often heard in informal conversation, but it would be more acceptable to keep the parallelism.

2. And now *to painting*. ... *let's talk (let's come to talk/speak) about painting*.

The candidate has produced a quite standard colloquialism, which the examiner has unnecessarily expanded. Indeed, "let's come to talk about painting" is extremely tortuous. There are many common sentences which

indicate the normality of the construction, e.g. "To bed" (said, for example, to a child at bedtime); "To work" (i.e. "Let's start work"). It is of course unclear from the construction what kind of activity is to be begun – whether talking, acting, thinking, or whatever.

3. In my opinion we must beware of the common mistake *to judge* everything from its usefulness. ... *of judging ... by ...*

Two types of construction which are often confused are illustrated by this example: "It is a mistake to judge everything ..." and "That is the mistake of judging everything ..." The examiner is therefore correct. But if some punctuation had been inserted after "mistake", one can see a possible use, with the final clause being in apposition: "... of the common mistake: to judge ..." As regards the preposition, "by" is probably the more common (i.e. "with respect to"), but "from" can also be used in a similar sense (i.e. "on the basis of"). I would not have corrected the candidate here.

4. By the light of the match the policeman saw an energetic face with a little scar *over* the left eye. ... *above ...*
In this context there is no difference in meaning or usage between the two versions.

5. It was just some minutes *before* ten o'clock when he came back. ... *to ...*
Both are possible. The use of "to" implies greater specificity, as in such phrases as "it is five minutes to ten", where one would not usually expect to see "it is five minutes before ten", except in some dramatic narrative contexts. Given the non-specific context, as here, "before" is more appropriate: "some minutes to ten" is less used.

6. Bob took the little piece of paper that the policeman had *given to him*. ... *given him ...*

When the indirect object precedes the direct object *to* is not normally used, e.g. *"I gave to him the book". In the present case, however, there is no following direct object; the *to* is possible, and indeed is often preferred if the directionality of the action needs to be emphasised. But note that while this applies readily to the verb *give*, there are a number of verbs in the language where this transformation is not applicable. Compare: "I gave the book to John / I gave John the book"; "I suggested the idea to John" /

*"I suggested John the idea". In example 10 below, the examiner has corrected in the opposite direction, which really shows how flexible the present-day situation is for this construction.

7. We agreed to come here after twenty years even if we *had to travel* thousands of miles. ... *would have to travel ...*

If one is attending strictly to the nuances of the sequence of tenses expected here, then the examiner is correct. But his sentence is awkward, and in everyday speech the speaker often does not bother to work out the intricate time-relationships, and uses a general past form. Thus the candidate's version will often be heard.

8. He is the truest friend *I ever had*. ... *I've ever had ...*

Both are possible. If the event had just been completed, the *have*-form would have been the appropriate one, e.g. (after a meal) "That's the nicest meal I've ever had". But in the present paragraph, there is presumably nothing "recent" about the friendship, and there is no need to keep to the recent past verb form. The candidate's version will thus be heard, especially in colloquial speech; and in non-standard speech "I ever had" may be heard everywhere, e.g. "This'll be the nicest meal you ever had".

9. She *has lived* in London since 1953. ... *has been living ...*

Normally, the examiner's version would be used, as presumably the sense of duration is foremost in the speaker's mind. But it is perfectly possible to think up contexts where the non-progressive form could be used, and the candidate's version will often be heard.

10. This is the red tweed suit which Sir Henry *gave Barrymore* last week. ... *gave to Barrymore ...*

See No. 5 above. Both versions are possible.

11. He took the two pounds and gave *them* to him. ... *it / the money ...*

Assuming the two pounds is being viewed as a single sum of money, then the singular agreement is normal ("Give me that two pounds or I'll hit you", "The two pounds is on the table"); but if the two pounds is being seen as two separate units, e.g. two separate notes, the candidate's version becomes possible. The examiner's suggestion is clearly the more likely.

DAVID CRYSTAL