

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. The photos were not so good *as we had been looking for*.
2. The basis of the old world *were* love and justice.
3. We can see this *by* many examples.
4. I decided to *go*.
5. But out of the five umbrellas standing there he could not use *anyone*.
6. So what could he *tell to his family*?
7. *This special kind of measures* is taken when there is a war.
8. But *by* the influence of the Romans, they got to know the value of money.
9. "You are fat," said the wolf to the dog, "*while I who I hunt all day have* scarcely enough to eat."
10. I can *listen to* music in my spare time.
11. Many people stay in a single town for all their *life*.
12. People often suffer from a stress which has bad consequences *on* their nerves.

The examiner corrected:

- ... *as we had expected*.
- ... *was* ...
- ... *in* ...
- ... *go away*.
- ... *any*.
- ... *tell his family?*
- These measures are* ...
- ... *through* ...
- ... *while I hunt all day and still have* ...
- ... *hear* ...
- ... *lives* ...
- ... *for* ...

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf S. 50.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 41.

1. The photos were not so good *as we had been looking for*. ... *as we had expected*.

The main change here is for lexical reasons: *look for* (i.e. 'search out') being replaced by *expect* (i.e. 'anticipate'). Only by the provision of further context could we know which is the sense intended, and thus whether there has been an error. As the sentences stand, both are possible. The examiner's grammatical alteration is not strictly necessary: 'as we had been expecting' could have been used. (So also might '. . . as we expected', but this would be more colloquial.) It should also be noted that *so* is the less common conjunction in the earlier part of this construction, being used as an alternative to *as* in negative sentences, in formal styles.

2. The basis of the old world *were* love and justice. ... *was* ...

The examiner is correct. The candidate has been confused by the coordinated nouns after the verb *to be*, and he has made the verb plural, whereas of course he should have the verb agreeing in number with the subject, *basis*. There are a few "exceptional" cases of subject-verb concord in English (e.g. with collective nouns, with coordinated subjects), but these are not involved in the present sentence.

3. We can see this *by* many examples. ... *in* ...

There is very little difference between these two sentences. *By* carries the implication 'by means of', 'through the use of', and in this sense the candidate's sentence would be in answer to a *how* question, e.g. 'How can we see this?'. *In* may have a comparable general sense ('with regard to'), but it also has the dominant specific sense of 'physically within', where the appropriate question-form would be 'Where can we see this?'. The examiner's version, then, would be acceptable if one were visualising the 'examples' in a fairly "concrete" way; e.g. '. . . in many examples of his painting' would suggest the interpretation that some specific features of his paintings are being referred to.

4. I decided to *go*. ... *go away*.

As with 1 above, what was meant? Both are possible, but with a difference of meaning that it would be simple to establish from any dictionary.

5. But out of the five umbrellas standing there, he could not use *anyone*. ... *any*.

The examiner is correct: *anyone* is the personal, countable, non-assertive, singular pronoun; the non-personal pronoun would be *anything*, also

ruled out here because of the plural antecedent. The only possible form is *any*. (Note however the possibility of having *any one* in some emphatic contexts, where *one* is a numeral, e.g. 'I don't mind which book I have. Any one will do' [to be compared with 'I don't mind which books I have. Any three will do']. At normal speed, the extra stress expected for the numeral is often reduced, so that the phrase may be homophonous with *anyone*.)

6. So what could he *tell to his family*?

... *tell his* ...

In the sense 'inform' / 'make known to', *tell* is regularly used with a 'transposed' direct object, the logical direct object being understood. Compare: *I'll tell the vicar*, **I'll tell to the vicar*; *I'll tell the vicar the truth*, *I'll tell the truth to the vicar*. Even in the case of an explicit double object, however, the examiner's version would be the more natural, being the result of a simple deletion of the direct object, which generally comes in final position (*viz.* 'He could tell his family [the story].') The candidate's version is not impossible, being the reduced form of the alternative order ('He could tell the story to his family'), but it is less likely, presumably reflecting the less common use of this object-sequence.

7. *This special kind of measures is taken when there is a war. These measures are* ...

Kind of, along with a number of similar phrases, is often used within a noun phrase. Its meaning is not usually precisely 'species of', but is rather a looser, vaguer sense, which may at times reflect little more than an expression of hesitation or uncertainty on the part of the speaker. In its strict sense, it has a plural: one would say *those kinds of measures*, etc. But this use is generally found only in formal speech, and is often avoided because of its phonetic awkwardness. In the looser sense, the phrase has to be seen as independent of the rest of the noun phrase. In the example 'There was a tall, red kind of bag on the table', it is obvious from the meaning of the lexis involved that it is the *bag* which is tall and red, and not *kind*. Grammatically, also, *kind of* is outside the structure of the noun phrase, and the examiner's version corrects this: the basic sentence is 'These special measures are ...'. The candidate has assumed that *kind* is head of the noun phrase, and has made the determiner and verb agree with it; but this is to ignore the meaning of the sentence.

8. But *by* the influence of the Romans, they got to know the value of money. ... *through* ...

The notion of 'by means of' with abstract nouns is generally expressed by *through*. The examiner

is correct, but the candidate's version can sometimes be heard.

9. "You are fat", said the wolf to the dog, "*while I who I hunt all day have scarcely enough to eat.*" ... *while I hunt all day and still have* ...

The elementary error in the candidate's sentence is the double use of *I*, which is impossible. But if we delete the second of these, then we are left with a sentence that is not only acceptable, but even expected in this kind of fairy-tale-telling style. The examiner has replaced the relative construction by a coordinated one, adding the adverb *still*, to maintain the lost semantic contrast. Choice of construction is therefore a stylistic matter.

10. I can *listen to* music in my spare time.

... *hear* ...

If the candidate meant the controlled activity of listening (e.g. to records), then his version is correct, and the examiner's is not possible. I imagine this was the intended sense. In a more general sense, one may 'hear music', of course, but the use of the specific adverbial phrase *in my spare time* would make this an unlikely interpretation. To use the static verb, *hear*, in this context (e.g. 'I hear music in my spare time') would imply some such meaning as 'I imagine I hear music', the clear implication being that the speaker was not entirely sane.

11. Many people stay in a single town for all their *life*. ... *lives*.

All may co-occur with singular countable nouns with the article (*all the car*), with plural countable nouns with or without the article (*all the pens*, *all pens*) and with mass nouns either with or without the article (*all the ink*, *all ink is messy*). In other words, the alternation between *all my life* and *all life* is essentially the difference between a count or mass interpretation of the noun. With a plural pronoun, there is accordingly some tension between the mass noun interpretation (which would disallow a plural) and the count noun interpretation (which would allow a plural). The candidate has given the first, implying a collective notion of 'life in general'; the examiner has opted for the second, countable interpretation, implying a set of individual lives. But both are possible.

12. People often suffer from a stress which has bad consequences *on* their nerves. ... *for* ...

The examiner's version is possible, but is less idiomatic than the candidate's. *On* commonly collocates with *nerves*, e.g. 'get on my nerves', 'hard on my nerves', etc.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. A boy about twelve years old came in *with* a dripping ca ot.
2. I hold the view that a present should be *no-thing more than a gesture*.
3. Looking round, I suddenly *realized more* such ants.
4. Why did she say *so* to the boy?
5. I would not have been surprised if they had had their national anthem and *thrown* tea into Boston Harbour and *done* other things human beings do.
6. Of course there are different methods *to write* an essay.
7. The parents and all the other moths have set their *heart* on hanging around lamps in the darkness. (Zusammenhang: James Thurber, *The Moth and the Star*).
8. His parents counsel him to set his heart on a bridge lamp *instead* on his star. (Zusammenhang: vgl. Nr. 7)

The examiner corrected:

- ... *wearing* ...
- ... *nothing but an act of kindness*.
- ... *noticed more of* ...
- ... *that* ...
- ... *had thrown* ...
- ... *had done* ...
- ... *of writing* ...
- ... *hearts* ...
- ... *instead of/and not* ...

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf Seite 179f.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 168.

1. A boy about twelve years old came in *with* a dripping coat. ... *wearing* ...

The candidate's version is possible, if the sense intended is 'along with', i.e. the boy was carrying the coat; if the sense of 'wearing' is intended, then of course a change is necessary. A simpler alternative to the examiner's version would be *in*: this is common enough in speech, though in written English stylistic objections are sometimes raised to constructions involving a sequence of identical items.

2. I hold the view that a present should be *nothing more than a gesture*. ... *nothing but an act of kindness*.

Syntactic
There are no obligatory or semantic grounds for making these alterations. 'Gesture', in this context, means a symbolic indication of intention, i.e. presents should be viewed as representing only a small part of the feelings of the giver. The examiner's version provides a different emphasis: 'act of kindness' here is presumably opposed to some such notion as 'artificial convention'. The

two limiting constructions used ('more than ...', 'but ...') are interchangeable, the first expressing a more emphatic sense, viz. 'a gesture and no more', compared with the second, which, if used in the same example, would simply imply 'only a gesture'.

3. Looking round, I suddenly *realized more* such ants. ... *noticed more of* ...

In its sense of 'become fully aware of', *realize* usually takes a clause as object: exceptions are mainly abstract nouns, e.g. 'realize the risk', 'realize the nature of the task', but not * 'realize the table', etc. To be acceptable, the candidate's version would have to be followed by a *that*-clause, e.g. 'I realized that there were more ants ...'. The examiner's verb, *noticed*, has a more casual implication, but permits the noun phrases as object. Within the noun phrase, however, there is a further problem. The first is that this use of *such*, as an adjective, in the sense of 'previously characterized', is relatively uncommon, and usually found only in formal or archaic contexts; also countable nouns are less likely to be found in construction with it. The item normally used to fulfil anaphoric function in the above example is *these*, where the examiner's change to *more of* would be required. The examiner's correction to *more of such* is however impossible, whereas at least the candidate's version is possible, although rather artificial.

4. Why did she say *so* to the boy? ... *that* ...

Say so refers to the subject-matter or general import of a previous utterance, e.g. 'I think you ought to say so', and has a certain idiomatic ring about it. (Compare the nominal use, *say-so*, as in 'I'm not going to do it just on your say-so', where the latter part of the sentence might be paraphrased as 'just because you have told me to'.) In the present example, the use of *that* is immediately much more specific, referring to a particular aspect of the content or a particular form of words in the previous utterance. The examiner is asking why a specific utterance was used; the candidate is asking, more generally, why a certain topic had been raised. Only in a wider discourse would it be possible to judge which version would be correct.

5. I would not have been surprised if they had had their national anthem and *thrown* tea into Boston Harbour and *done* other things human beings do. ... *had thrown* ... *had done* ...

The examiner's correction is unnecessary and in fact produces an over-emphatic and rather artificial sentence. Elision of the auxiliary verb, in coordinate constructions where the same subject is implied throughout, is a normal and widely-used convention.

6. Of course there are different methods *to write* an essay. ... *of writing* ...

The examiner is correct, but the reasons are complex, and not fully understood by grammarians. The essential distinction in this context between participle and infinitive constructions seems to be aspectual: the former suggests an ongoing state of affairs, the latter a more specific context for the application of the noun. Compare, for example 'There are two ways of doing it', where the most likely interpretation is as a comment on a general situation, and 'There are two ways to do it', which *may* be synonymous with the participial use, but is more likely to be used with reference to suggestions for acting in a specific way at a specific point in time. The context of the candidate's sentence, and in particular the use of the word *method*, implying a generally observed procedure, may then account for the fact that the first construction is obligatory.

7. The parents and all the other moths have set their *heart* on hanging around lamps in the darkness. ... *hearts* ...

The examiner's is the normal version: 'We have all set our hearts on going out'. In a literal sense, to use the singular would imply the use of a single, shared phenomenon – and if one can detect such a metaphorical extension in the candidate's version, then it could stand. But it is most unlikely. If Thurber actually used this construction, therefore, it must for him have been an idiomatic use, where the singular form has no literal sense: this is a usage which I have heard in speech, in fact – but only in the *third* person plural, as here.

8. His parents counsel him to set his heart on a bridge lamp *instead* on his star. ... *instead of/and not* ...

The examiner is correct. If the candidate's construction does turn up in Thurber, it can only be a misprint.

DAVID CRYSTAL

Would you have marked it wrong?

The candidate wrote:

1. The young couple couldn't use *its* presents.
2. What could she do *than* make the best she could out of the situation.
3. He produced a lot of books, but I think *no one* has never been read.
4. The owners of the house and the flag pole were an elderly couple *which* had always cherished British glory and tradition.
5. I do not think that it is possible for *someone* to ignore reality.
6. In the time *the author* wrote this text life was different.
7. It was the first time that he confessed *to be* a failure.
8. His only joy was *to write* books.
9. I think the feelings that rose in me *watching* that struggle did not defer very much from those one has *witnessing* a war among men.
10. What else could she do *than to sit down* and cry.
11. Of course he knew everything better than *everybody* else.
12. Before the invention of the motor-car, people used to travel *by horses and ships*.

The examiner corrected:

- ... *their* ...
- ... *but* ...
- ... *none* ...
- ... *who* ...
- ... *anyone* ...
- ... *when the author* ...
- ... *that he was* ...
- ... *writing* ...
- ... *while watching* ...
- ... *when witnessing* ...
- ... *but sit down* ...
- ... *anybody* ...
- ... *on horseback, by coaches and by ship*.

Die Besprechung der einzelnen Punkte erfolgt auf S. 378f.

Would you have marked it wrong? Schlüssel

Vergleiche Seite 362.

1. The young couple couldn't use *its* presents.
... *their* ...

Collective nouns, like *army*, *crowd* and *family*, take either singular or plural concord, depending on whether one is stressing the unity of the group as a whole or the individuality of its members. *Couple* is in principle a collective noun: compare "There was one couple in the middle of the floor; another ..." and "The couple were very happy". But in practice, because of the very specific meaning of this lexical item, it is more natural to find contexts in which the twofold nature of the membership is being stressed. In the context of marriage, and the like (presumably intended here), the personal interpretation is the more likely, and plural concord is therefore expected. The examiner is thus correct. But one could imagine a

collective sense applying if, for example, the "young couple" was opposed to the "old couple", or other "types of couple". Then the singular concord be used.

2. What could she do *than* make the best she could out of the situation.
... *but* ...

The candidate is here being misled by the comparison implicit in the sentence, and assuming that the appropriate conjunction is the comparative-marker, *than*. Structurally, however, *than* is restricted to sentences containing a formal comparative, which is lacking here. The examiner is therefore correct to substitute a conjunction which expresses the concessive sense: *except* would also have been possible. The same point applies in 10 below.

3. He produced a lot of books, but I think *no one* has ever been read.
... *none* ...

None is the correct way of referring to inanimate objects. *No one* would be possible in an emphatic context, where it would mean "no single one of ...", and both items would have to be stressed. This is obviously not the sense intended here.

4. The owners of the house and the flag pole were an elderly couple *which* had always cherished British glory and tradition.
... *who* ...

In its individualised sense (cf. 1 above), *couple* has a clearly personal interpretation, and the personal form of the relative pronoun is therefore appropriate. The candidate's version is not possible.

5. I do not think that it is possible for *someone* to ignore reality.
... *anyone* ...

Either version is possible. The difference between the *some*-words and *any*-words in English has long been treated in an oversimplified way in English language teaching. There is a strong tendency – but it *is* only a tendency – for *some* to be used in positive contexts, and *any* in negative, as in *I want some* vs. *I don't want any*. What is sometimes forgotten is that while the form **I want any* is unlikely, *I don't want some* is quite possible. A more specific or positive orientation is given to the sense. The point applies equally to *someone* and *anyone*. *Do you know anyone?*, said by wife to husband on arrival at a party, is a neutral, general question. *Do you know someone?* would imply that the wife thinks the husband *has* recognised somebody. In the present example, the context is so abstract that it is difficult to differentiate the senses involved; but presumably the candidate's version would be likely to be said about a specific individual (his sentence might have continued "... like Kafka does"), whereas the examiner's is more a general statement, about the world at large (and, unlike *someone*, could be strongly stressed).

6. In the time *the author* wrote this text life was different.
... *when the author* ...

The sense of *time* intended here is clearly "period of history", as opposed to "length of time". The sentence is not intended to mean "During the length of time that the author took to write his text, the way of life changed"; it means "At that time, life was different from what it is now". Without the subordinating conjunction, the noun

is ambiguous, and gives a misleading start to the sentence. The choice of preposition contributes to this complexity, of course: a more appropriate choice for the sense required would be *at*.

7. It was the first time that he confessed *to be* a failure.
... *that he was*.

The examiner is correct. Alternatively, he might have used "... to being a failure", to avoid the awkward sequence of two *that*-clauses.

8. His only joy was *to write* books.
... *writing* ...

Either version is possible, but the examiner's is rather more likely, in this context. The *-ing*-form focusses on the durative aspect of the act of writing: his joy came while he was performing the act of writing. The infinitival form presents the writing as an activity seen from a single point in time, contrasted perhaps with other types of activity. But both forms are possible.

9. I think the feelings that rose in me *watching* that struggle did not differ very much from those one has *witnessing* a war among men.
... *while watching* ... *when witnessing* ...

The examiner's corrections produce a version that many would consider stylistically more elegant, and its greater explicitness minimises the risk of ambiguity; but the candidate's version is quite possible. The change from *while* to *when* is not strictly necessary: again, stylistic reasons prevail.

10. What else could she do *than to sit down* and cry.
... *but sit down*.

See 2 above.

11. Of course he knew everything better than *everybody* else.
... *anybody* ...

The negative emphasis of the comparison suggests the use of *anybody*, but the more positive version is possible. See 5 above.

12. Before the invention of the motor-car, people used to travel *by horses and ships*.
... *on horseback, by coaches and by ship*.

The examiner's historic-cultural correction unfortunately perpetuates the candidate's error: the appropriate form would be *by coach*. The important point is to use the singular form of the noun. His other corrections do produce possible prepositional collocations, but it would have been possible also to have *by horse*: *by horse, coach and ship*.

DAVID CRYSTAL