



# Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

**LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2025**

## **English - Higher Level - Paper 1**

**Total Marks: 200**

**Wednesday, 4 June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20**

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **PERSPECTIVES**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

### **SECTION I – COMPREHENDING**

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.

**N.B.** Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

### **SECTION II – COMPOSING**

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

**Do not hand this up.**

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### TEXT 1 – The Underdog Effect – Changing Perspectives

This text is an edited article by David Robson entitled, 'The Underdog's Surprising Appeal', published on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2024, in the BBC *Essential* newsletter. It demonstrates how our perspectives can change with the "underdog effect".

From the US election to the Olympic Games, we often root for those considered disadvantaged. Why we do so may reveal more about ourselves than them. The rise of the underdog is woven through history's most compelling narratives. From fairy tale's Cinderella and fictional boxer Rocky, to real-world activist Erin Brockovich, we simply cannot resist stories in which the weak and vulnerable triumph over the strong and powerful.

We can see this preference in sports. Just consider the popularity of the Jamaican bobsled team, in the 1988 Winter Olympics, who inspired the film, *Cool Runnings*. According to some political commentators, playing up an underdog status may even sway our voting intentions. As someone who had never held political office, Donald Trump pitched himself as the underdog of the 2016 presidential election.

Psychological studies of underdogs are few and far between. But the small body of literature that does exist can help us to understand why we so often find ourselves rooting for those with the odds stacked against them – and the ways this peculiar quirk of the human mind can influence our broader decision-making.

On first consideration, the 'underdog effect' sits rather uncomfortably with humankind's known fixation on status and prestige. According to social identity theory, we often derive our self-esteem from the success of our group. Why would we willingly put ourselves through disappointment by supporting the 'back runner' who is far less likely to bring us success-by association? It would make much more sense to align ourselves with the likely



Underdog Jamaican Bobsled Team

winners of any event – so that we can bask in their glory.

To test whether the underdog effect was real, a fascinating study by Joseph Vandello at the University of South Florida in the mid-2000s examined students' reactions to the 2004 Olympics. The participants were presented with a list of five countries' all-time medal totals: Sweden (469), Bulgaria (195), Belgium (140), Mexico (40), Slovenia (6). They were then asked to imagine two of the countries engaged in an upcoming swimming event and to rate how much they would like to see each country win. No matter what pair they considered, the students showed a clear preference for the country that had won fewer medals historically. If they were given Sweden versus Belgium, for instance, they favoured Belgium, but if they were given Belgium versus Slovenia, they favoured Slovenia. Overall, 75% preferred the team with the fewer medals.

Another Vandello experiment showed that the appeal of the underdog lives or dies on perceptions of injustice. When asked to pick their favourites from a pair of sports teams, the participants tended to prefer those with the poorest track record, but this effect shrank if they found that the team was awash with cash. Then, the series of previous failures

barely attracted any sympathy. The underdog's plight, it seems, must come from a position of genuine weakness. "Disadvantage arouses a sense of injustice in most people that they wish to see rectified," reported Vandello.

In a 2021 research paper Francois Quesque, a post-doctoral researcher at the Lyon Neuroscience Research Centre in France, examined adults' perceptions of underdogs' emotions. He showed participants various comic strips and video clips of two people interacting, with one character appearing more dominant and powerful and giving orders to the other. When asked how the characters might feel at that precise moment, the participants were far more likely to consider the feelings of the character doing 'the serving' over the character issuing the orders. "It could be that high-power individuals are perceived as colder than low-power individuals," Quesque adds.

Given this deep-seated emotional bias, it may be little surprise that stories of underdogs are so prevalent in the cultural psyche.

"There is an inherent romance in having someone or a team beat the odds to achieve an unexpected outcome," says Robert Lunt, a professor of Management and Human Resources at Ohio State University. He

suspects that we often draw personal inspiration from these stories, which "highlight that anything is possible with hard work and determination".

Rightly or wrongly, we seem to assume that the underdogs will be trying extra hard to make up for their disadvantage, which renders them more likeable. Quesque suspects our heightened empathy for the underdog could shape our opinions in many different domains – justice decisions, politics, conflict resolution, and, of course, sports supporters' behaviours. "It appears that this effect is very strong, and can be observed in almost everyone, independently of participants' gender and self-reported dominance." If someone is actively looking to expand their popularity, there could be a clear advantage in framing themselves as the plucky chancer trying to challenge a more privileged or established opponent.



**N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.**

**QUESTION A – 50 Marks**

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, what insights do you gain about how the 'underdog effect' can influence our perspectives? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) To what extent do you agree with the writer's claim, in TEXT 1, that humankind has a "fixation on status and prestige"? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)
- (iii) "In TEXT 1, David Robson uses elements of language that are effective in making this article both informative and thought-provoking." To what extent do you agree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to four elements of Robson's style from the text. (20)

**QUESTION B – 50 Marks**

You are the captain of a school's sports team, about to compete, as the underdogs, in the final of a national competition and you are required to give the pre-match team-talk. Write the text of the talk that you would deliver. In your talk you should: outline to your team mates aspects of the game plan you have decided to employ on the field, remind them of the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents, and motivate them to overcome the odds and to achieve victory.

## TEXT 2 – The Perspective of a ‘Wise Old Counsellor’

TEXT 2 consists of a speech made by Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, at the One Young World Congress in Montreal in September 2024. In her speech she gives advice to young people from the viewpoint of what she calls herself, “a wise old counsellor”.

Good evening. I’m Margaret Atwood, and I write books. Some people consider these books to be gloomy dystopias, but I think they’re quite optimistic, as I haven’t yet killed off every single character in them. That’s looking on the bright side.

However, I’m a bit surprised to find myself at a gathering called One Young World. I’m older than Donald Trump - and better looking! It’s an honour to be here with such an impressive bunch of young people! You’re so filled with energy! One day you will have to take naps after lunch. So, cherish the moment.

But what a difficult moment we are living in right now. The astrologers will tell you the stars have not aligned like this since the French Revolution. That wasn’t a whole lot of fun, what with the guillotines and mass drownings, though the ideas many of us cherish today – liberty, equality, a free press, democratic elections, and violent bloodthirsty public spectacles such as football – began right there.

Every human invention and ideology is a three-sided knife: the good side, the bad side, and the stupid side you didn’t anticipate. As every planner and inventor and policy wonk knows, part of the job is to ask yourself: What could go wrong? Often, quite a few things. Dare I whisper the words ‘plastic’ and ‘social media’? The first is in your bloodstream right now, the second is addling your brain, not to mention your kids’ brains. Is there a good side to either of them? Yes. It will be your task to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. Though that’s easier said than done.

However – I bring a message to you from a planet far, far away and in another time – namely, the past. That message is: *Cheer up, it’s been worse*. Once, there were no avocados in North America. Once, children were taught to duck under their school desks in case of an atomic bomb attack (how stupid



was that!). Once, there was a world war that involved over seventy countries and killed an estimated 80 million people. Once, deadly plagues swept the earth – the bubonic plague that killed half the population of Europe. But so far, the human race has come through it all. And you can, too.

Your generation has many of the old kinds of problems – wars, economic inequalities, social disruptions, authoritarian regimes – but you have some new ones as well. The worst one now is climate change. It has brought with it a whole lot of other changes: whirlwind wildfires, floods, soil erosion, violent winds, droughts, bad harvests, and – driven by all these things – human migration on a vast scale. These conditions are deeply unsettling. But as my mother used to say, “Roll up your sleeves”. That meant there was work to be done.

What kind of work must be done? Many kinds, but all are works of renewal, and all involve changing the way we see and imagine our lives. How do we adapt from fossil fuels to renewables without causing riots and warlords? How do we restore damaged soil, degraded forests, trashed ecosystems, overfished and plastic-clogged oceans, poisoned fresh waters? How do we safeguard the living species on this planet, including our own?

There are many solutions already underway. We're now seeing marine parks that increase fish numbers, mushrooms that eat plastics, and organic fibres made from such substances as sea algae, bamboo, and bananas. Printable houses can now be made in a couple of days. Plastic waste is being recycled into building boards and fabrics. New fuels such as hydrogen are being developed – low-carbon heating and cooling and energy technologies. More productive and less toxic ways of growing food. And – why not? – new foods. Who ever heard of chia seeds in 1955?

You yourselves will know of many more initiatives. But to be effective, new materials and methods must have three things in common. First, the innovations must have lower carbon emissions than what they replace. Second, they must be cheap enough so that many, many people will be able to deploy them. And third, they must be attractive enough so people will want to actually use them. Looking good and tasting good are built-in human must-haves.

I will add a fourth thing: these solutions and their deployment must be ultimately international. International co-operation will be key. Yes, all beneficial actions must be local and grounded, ideas alone are ineffective unless they can become part of real peoples' lives – but there must be enough local uses to make a difference. And there must be enough benefit for local people – otherwise they won't bother, and why should they? Among the most effective conservation efforts have been those led by indigenous peoples – they are motivated to care for their homelands, and they have up-close knowledge to do so. But no one can do this alone. Inspiring visionaries, scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs, funders, policy makers, on-the-ground organisers, and yes, even AI analysts – this is a jigsaw puzzle with a great many pieces.

But you've got the energy and optimism to take on the challenge: otherwise, you wouldn't be here. I'm very much looking forward to seeing what you'll come up with. My final three words to you are: Go. For. It.

**N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.**

#### **QUESTION A – 50 Marks**

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2 what insights do you gain about Margaret Atwood's perspective on current world problems? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) To what extent do you agree with the observation, in TEXT 2, that in order to address world problems, "all beneficial actions must be local and grounded"? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)
- (iii) "In TEXT 2, Margaret Atwood uses elements of language that are effective in making this speech both engaging and inspiring." To what extent do you agree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to four elements of Atwood's style from the text. (20)

#### **QUESTION B – 50 Marks**

You are a hotel manager. A recent, disgruntled guest has left a highly critical review of your hotel and its facilities on a travel-review website. You decide to challenge this person's views with an **online response** on the same website. In your response you should: outline the proud tradition and history of your establishment, challenge the specific criticisms of the guest reviewer, and encourage the reviewer to return by highlighting some of the exciting upcoming events in your hotel and its locality.

### TEXT 3 – Planet Earth from the Perspective of Space

TEXT 3 consists of edited extracts from Samantha Harvey's novel, *Orbital*, published in 2024. It tells the story of six astronauts in a H-shaped spacecraft rotating above the earth. They are there to collect meteorological data and conduct scientific experiments. But mostly they observe.

Six of them in a great H of metal hanging above the earth. They turn head on heel, six astronauts (American, Japanese, British, Italian and two Russian), two women, four men, one space station. They are the latest six of many, nothing unusual about this anymore, routine astronauts in earth's backyard. They will each be here for nine months or so, nine months of this weightless drifting, nine months of this earthward gaping, then back to the patient planet below.

Some alien civilisation might look on and ask: what are they doing here? Why do they go nowhere but round and round? The earth is the answer to every question. The earth is the face of an exulted lover; they watch it sleep and wake and become lost in its habits. The earth is a mother waiting for her children to return. They look down and they understand why it's called Mother Earth. And this in turn makes them feel like children with their towering parent ever-present through the dome of glass.

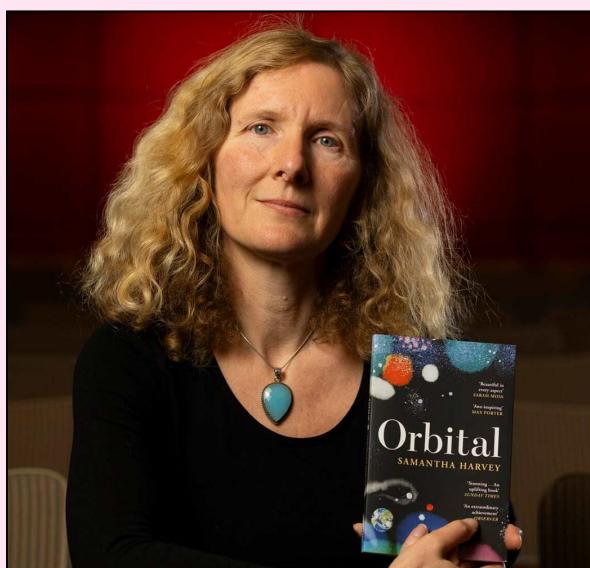
Its beauty echoes – its beauty is its echoing, its ringing singing lightness. It's made of rock but appears from here as gleam and ether. They sweep a seventy-kilometre swathe of the planet as the craft orbits, moving from continent to continent, north and south, an obsessive eye watching, gathering, calibrating light.

At first they're drawn to the views at night – the gorgeous encrusting of city lights and the surface dazzle of man-made things. There's something so crisp and clear and purposeful about the earth by night, its thick embroidered urban tapestries. Almost every line of Europe's coastline is inhabited and the whole continent outlined with fine precision, the cities'

constellations joined by the golden thread of roads. Those same golden threads track across the Alps, usually greyish blue with snowfall.

At night they can point to home – there's Seattle, Osaka, London, Bologna, St Petersburg and Moscow. The night's electric excess takes their breath. The spread of life. The way the planet proclaims: there is something and someone here. And how, for all that, a sense of friendliness and peace prevails, since even at night there's only one man-made border in the whole of the world; a long trail of lights between Pakistan and India. That's all civilisation has to show for its divisions, and by day even that has gone.

Soon things change. After a week or so of city awe, the senses begin to broaden and deepen and it's the daytime earth they come to love. It's the humanless simplicity of land and sea. The way the planet seems to breathe, an animal unto itself. It's the perfection of the sphere which transcends all language. It's the black hole of the Pacific becoming a field of gold or French Polynesia dotted below, the islands like cell samples; then the spindle of



Central America which drops away beneath them now to bring to view the Bahamas and Florida. It's Uzbekistan in an expanse of ochre and brown. The clean and brilliant Indian Ocean of blues untold. The apricot desert of Takla Makan.

In passing through the lab, Nell, who is from England, looks out and sees the promise of Europe on the watery horizon. She feels somehow speechless. Speechless at the fact of her loved ones being down there on that stately and resplendent sphere, as if she's just discovered they've been living all along in the palace of a king or queen.

A low light outside - the south coast of Ireland – where her husband is – and England portside; they skirt below these coasts before going south through the centre of Europe. And as they traverse south the colours change, the browns lighter, the palette less sombre. She and her husband exchange photographs almost daily; sometimes his view of the lough and the mountain, sometimes a close-up of a flower or gatepost, sometimes the sea or the clouds. In return she sends him pictures of the earth, of

the stars and moon, of the sleeping quarters and crew mates and dinners and modules. Her husband says that Africa from space looks like a Turner painting; those near-formless landscapes of thick impasto shot with light.

Before long, for all of them, a desire takes hold. It's the desire – no, the need (fuelled by fervour) – to protect this huge yet tiny earth. This thing of such miraculous and bizarre loveliness. An unbounded place, a suspended jewel so bright.

Roman, from Moscow, seems to know that something is ending. So many astronauts have passed through here, this orbiting laboratory, this science experiment in the carefully controlled nurturing of peace. And it will end through the restless spirit of endeavour that made it possible in the first place. Striking out, further and deeper. The moon, Mars. Further yet. A human being was not made to stand still. Maybe there's another parent-planet; earth was our mother and Mars or somewhere will be our father. We are not such orphans-in-waiting after all.

**N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.**

#### **QUESTION A – 50 Marks**

(i) Based on your reading of TEXT 3 what insights do you gain about planet Earth by viewing it from the perspective of space? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)

(ii) To what extent do you agree with the view in, TEXT 3, that, "striking out, further and deeper" into space is worthwhile? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)

(iii) "In TEXT 3, Samantha Harvey uses elements of language that are effective in making the writing in this passage both elegant and thought-provoking." To what extent do you agree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to four elements of Harvey's style from the text. (20)

#### **QUESTION B – 50 Marks**

You are a contributor to a podcast entitled, *Eyes Wide Open*, where you reflect on how your perspective on a significant issue changed as a result of an experience or an encounter. Write your **reflection** for the podcast in which you: identify the issue and explain your previous attitude towards it, describe the experience or encounter that changed your perspective, and consider some of the life lessons that you and others can learn from this reflection.

## SECTION II

## COMPOSING

**(100 marks)**

Write a composition on **any one** of the assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In TEXT 3, Nell and her husband exchange photographs as a means of staying close while they are far apart.

**Write a discursive essay in which you consider the power and value of both printed and digital photographic images today.**

2. The theme of this examination, 'Perspectives', explores how we see things in different ways.

**Write a speech for or against the motion that: "Truth has become a valueless currency in today's world."**

3. TEXT 1 analyses how the 'Underdog Effect' influences people's attitudes and behaviour.

**Write a short story in which a "plucky chancer" challenges a more privileged or established opponent.**

4. In TEXT 1 the writer asks why we would, "willingly put ourselves through disappointment".

**Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the disappointments you have experienced and the impact they have had on you.**

5. In TEXT 2 Margaret Atwood tells young people, "you've got the energy and optimism to take on the challenge."

**Write a feature article entitled, 'A love letter to Ireland' in which you explore some of the reasons why we should view contemporary Irish society through an optimistic lens.**

6. In TEXT 2 Margaret Atwood refers to cherishing, "democratic elections".

**Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the factors that would influence your voting intentions in future elections.**

7. In TEXT 3, the character Roman thinks that – "A human being was not made to stand still."

**Write a short story featuring an ambitious character whose reckless actions lead to disaster.**

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## Acknowledgements

### Texts

Robson, David. BBC Essential. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240802-why-do-underdogs-in-sports-and-politics-gain-support> August 2024.

Atwood, Margaret. One Young World Congress, Montreal. September 2024.

Harvey, Samantha. *Orbital*, London. Jonathan Cape. 2023.

### Images

Image on page 2: <https://ar.inspiredpencil.com/pictures-2023/jamaican-bobsled-cool-runnings>

Image on page 3: <https://nypost.com/2013/02/15/man-who-helped-created-underdog-cartoon-dies/>

Image on page 4: <https://ologramma.art/ianoyarios-margaret-atwood/>

Image on page 6: <https://www.thebookseller.com/books/books-top-stories/into-orbit-samantha-harveys-orbital-becomes-first-booker-champ-to-hit-number-one-in-week-of-its-win>

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Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

English

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