



Trial Examination 2023

VCE English Units 3&4

Written Examination

Suggested Solutions for Section C

ARGUMENT AND PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE

The following is an example of an upper-mid range response to Section C that appropriately responds to all the assessment criteria.

In an angry post on the *Garrickville Community Action* website on 24 March 2023, Jennifer Erikson, spokesperson for Greener in Garrickville (GIG), protests against the felling of the historical Federation Elm. Erikson's post was answered on 27 March by Councillor Paul Chang, a representative of the Garrickville Council. Erikson is emotional in her response to the issue, and seeks to elicit emotion in her readers so that they will support GIG and work to oppose the Council. Conversely, Councillor Chang attempts, in a distinctly impersonal tone, to defend the actions of the Council.

Erikson plays on her audience's sympathetic feelings towards the Federation Elm. She speaks of the tree as a 'magnificent' and 'beloved local landmark' in personal and collective memory. She goes on to say that the tree was one of Victoria's 'oldest and best-known specimens of the English Elm', an 'iconic' tree 'at the very heart of Garrickville's identity'. Through these references, Erikson establishes that the Federation Elm was a source of pride, deeply embedded in local history. Erikson also emphasises that the Federation Elm features in the 'most cherished memories' of Garrickville's residents, linking together the elderly who 'sought its shade' and the young who 'played beneath it'. Thus, she suggests its loss will be deeply felt, all the more so because its sheltering presence has been lost as the result of the Council's 'senseless vandalism' – a term that connotes both pointlessness and criminality.

Relying on community support from her 'Friends', Erikson does not hesitate to brand the Council's decision to cut down the tree as 'profoundly shocking' and 'an outrage.' She reminds her readers that the Federation Elm was alive 'a few brief days ago' and it took only 'a matter of hours' to destroy 'more than 100 years of growth'. By stating that the Council cut down the tree 'without adequate community consultation' and 'in an act of stealth', she implies that they are not to be trusted. The Council, in Erikson's view, does not live up to the principles they profess. She notes that 'their own charter states that "trees help keep our ecosystem resilient, our city liveable and Garrickville's unique character and heritage intact"'. The Council's actions contradict these claims, so it follows that they must be 'inadequate custodians of the best that Garrickville has to offer'. Erikson goes on to assert that if 'trees in general' provide many tangible benefits, a special tree such as the Federation Elm should have been even more deserving of the Council's care. Thus, Erikson seeks to elicit feelings of disappointment towards the Council's decision.

The embedded graphics reinforce Erikson's line of argument. On the left is a photo of the Federation Elm in its prime. On the right is a rundown, partly-paved area adjoining a housing development. The comparison between the two images suggests that the Council does not 'care about living things more than barren concrete'. Demonstrating the shortcomings of the Council is a way for Erikson to convince her readers that they need to 'step into the shoes that [the Council] cannot fill.' Erikson is realistic in admitting that, regrettably, it is 'too late ... to save the Federation Elm'. She uses this unfortunate fact to motivate her fellow residents to be on their guard in the future. In suggesting how uncomfortable it would feel to 'be left thinking there is more you could have done', she encourages them to commit to action while there is still time. Through these arguments, Erikson aims to recruit new supporters for GIG and elicit a more active involvement in the group from those who may show few signs of participation. To enhance the bonds already existing within the community, she invites her readers to gather together to share recollections of a tree of exceptional importance, which 'has been inseparably entwined' with all stages of their lives.

Unlike Erikson, Councillor Paul Chang does not seek to engage readers at an emotional level. Instead, Councillor Chang tries to defuse a potentially difficult situation. Acting as the voice of the Council, he remains resolutely impersonal. He wants to reassure the local people that the Council has their best interests at heart and create the impression that the Council is more focused on growth than 'greed in Garrickville'. For this reason, he says that the decision to remove the Federation Elm was taken because 'the tree posed considerable safety risks.' Thus, he aims to make the Council sound like a responsible and protective guardian of the Garrickville community. Councillor Chang insists that the Council followed 'best practice' in order to achieve 'optimal balanced outcomes.' These phrases have positive connotations, which work to reinforce the image and reputation of the Garrickville Council.

By saying that the Council understands that ‘concerns have been raised’, Councillor Chang proves that they are not out of touch with the community’s views. He also indicates that Council policy reflects ‘consultation with the public’, suggesting that community members are not excluded from decisions that directly affect them. Councillor Chang wants his readers to have confidence in the Council, so that they will refrain from voicing complaints. He continuously emphasises that proper procedures were followed. An ‘independent arborist’ who would be free of bias was consulted, and the public can read the arborist’s reports on the Council website, so nothing is being kept from them.

To retain a hold on public support, it is important that the Council should not seem indifferent to environmental concerns. For this reason, Councillor Chang begins his response by saying that the Council ‘recognises the significance of trees’ and goes on to maintain that ‘every effort was made’ to save the Federation Elm. To some extent, he even acknowledges that cutting down the Federation Elm has had an emotional impact on people and is ‘a matter of distress to numerous residents.’ This, however, is not a point that he wishes to emphasise. He prefers to make the Council look good by saying that they are committed to both ‘sustainable environmental practices’ and ‘future planning needs’. This makes the Council sound progressive and prudent.

Both Jennifer Erikson and Councillor Paul Chang recognise the Federation Elm as a serious local issue. As a Council member, Councillor Chang is concerned with defending the Council’s decisions and shielding himself and his colleagues from possible blame. Conversely, Erikson represents the Council’s actions regarding a ‘beloved local landmark’ as typical of their distorted priorities and disengagement from what matters to the people of Garrickville. Where Erikson plays on the heartstrings of her readers to inflame their resentment towards the Council, Councillor Chang speaks in a measured and professional fashion to assure Garrickville residents that the Council can be trusted not to act without due consideration.

The following is an example of a high-range response to Section C that appropriately responds to all the assessment criteria.

Whether on a global or local scale, it is notoriously difficult to reconcile the demands of conservation and progress. In an indignant tirade posted on the *Garrickville Community Action* website on 24 March 2023, Jennifer Erikson denounced her municipal council for felling the historic Federation Elm. As a spokesperson for the local environmental community group Greener in Garrickville (GIG), Erikson characterises this act as profoundly at odds with the values of her community. Erikson’s post elicited a firm but cautious response on 27 March from Councillor Paul Chang. Where Erikson emphasises the emotional dimension of what occurred, Councillor Chang seeks to frame the Council’s actions as a matter of civic responsibility.

From the outset, Erikson plays on her audience’s sympathetic feelings towards the Federation Elm. Her use of specific adjectives to characterise the tree as a ‘magnificent’ and ‘beloved local landmark’ amplifies its significance in the hearts and minds of her readers. Not only was the tree one of Victoria’s ‘oldest and best-known specimens of the English Elm’, it was an ‘iconic’ tree ‘at the very heart of Garrickville’s identity.’ Erikson uses these references to establish that the Federation Elm was a source of pride, deeply embedded in local history. Through the antithetical pairing of the tree’s ‘more than 100 years of growth’ and the mere ‘matter of hours’ in which it was destroyed, Erikson cultivates the audience’s awareness of the vulnerability of the natural world and, concomitantly, the efforts that must be made to preserve it. The accompanying photograph of the Federation Elm also conveys its age and majesty, using a low-angled shot to make the viewer feel dwarfed in comparison to the tree, almost as though they are gazing up at its branches in awe. Since the Federation Elm featured in the ‘most cherished memories’ of Garrickville’s residents, its loss will be deeply felt. By employing a plural voice that gathers together ‘all in Garrickville’, Erikson invites her fellow residents to join in an act of shared mourning. She intensifies this effect by personifying the Federation Elm; it has been ‘laid low’, as a person might be by a vicious illness or a cruel stroke of fate. Like an elder of the community that had ‘seen more years than any of us’, the tree had reached the end of its days. However, Erikson intimates that this was a result of ‘senseless vandalism’ – a term connoting both pointlessness and criminality – rather than natural processes. Hence, those who have treasured the Federation Elm are simultaneously led to feel the absence of a respected companion and grieve the tree’s untimely fate.

Simultaneously relying on the community solidarity she has fostered and aiming to evoke righteous indignation within her audience, Erikson does not hesitate to brand the Council initiative to fell the tree ‘profoundly shocking’ and an ‘outrage.’ To further besmirch the reputation of the Council, Erikson accuses them of internal inconsistency and quotes them verbatim to indicate that they are in contravention of their own charter. She notes that ‘even the Council admits’ that trees are important for the health of Garrickville; the adverb ‘even’ serves as an almost condescending acknowledgement of the Council’s limited grasp of the issue, but hints that she and the readers are far more enlightened. However, she also suggests that the Council’s actions belie their stated policies. Thus, Erikson positions the Council as hypocritical and unreliable. In Erikson’s view, they merely ‘profess’ standards rather than abiding by them, and are more concerned with their public image – bolstered by superficial ‘face-saving’ – than with the needs of Garrickville. She implies that this is typical of the Council, who acted irresponsibly ‘as usual’ and committed themselves to miscalculation upon miscalculation in their support for ‘yet another housing development.’ By undermining the overall integrity of the Council’s decision-making – not just their most recent decision to fell the Federation Elm – Erikson insinuates that they cannot be trusted, thereby encouraging her readers to view any justification from the Council as spurious and deceitful. In successive sentences of parallel structure, Erikson calls on them to do better ‘if they value heritage ... If they care’. These exhortations follow the account of the Council conducting themselves ‘selfishly and shamelessly’ in authorising the destruction of a tree so ‘inseparably entwined with the lives’ of local residents. Thus, Erikson leaves readers doubting the Council’s capacity to rise to this challenge, laying groundwork for her ultimate aim of rallying public support for GIG.

By asserting that the Council are ‘inadequate custodians of the best that Garrickville has to offer’, Erikson highlights a power void and implies it is the responsibility of the right-minded supporters of GIG to fill it. The failure to preserve the Federation Elm is used by Erikson to spur a greater commitment to future action and to ‘deepen ... [the] resolve’ of her own supporters. The flourishing, imposing tree in the first graphic reminds readers of what they have lost; when it is juxtaposed with the second image, it highlights the dubious merit of what they stand to gain – another badly maintained concrete wasteland with a few stunted trees struggling to survive. Having addressed her readers as ‘Friends’, Erikson further invites them to join with her in the camaraderie of sharing memories and working proactively to preserve Garrickville.

Unlike Erikson, Councillor Paul Chang does not seek to generate interpersonal engagement. He speaks as the voice of the Council, avoiding all statements of his own opinion. Councillor Chang makes frequent use of passive constructions such as ‘it was found’ and ‘it was confirmed’, which fail to link key actions to any particular person who might have performed them. This further reinforces the impersonal quality of his response. Although the Council may understand that ‘the removal of the Federation Elm is a matter of distress to numerous residents’, there is no note of commiseration in what Councillor Chang has to say. He is attempting to limit damage to the Council’s reputation and seeking to deflect the imputation that the Council has done anything improper by continuously emphasising that proper procedures were followed. To forestall accusations of bias, he specifies that the Council consulted an ‘independent arborist’. He also mentions that, in the interests of transparency, the arborist’s reports can be viewed on the Council website. Councillor Chang frequently uses bureaucratic jargon such as ‘best practice’ and ‘optimal balanced outcomes’, in conjunction with somewhat archaic terms like ‘the purview of the Council’, to make Council proceedings sound official, complex and hard to fault. All of this is done to uphold the image and reputation of the Garrickville Council.

Councillor Chang is clearly aware of the unpopularity of the decision regarding the Federation Elm. He endeavours to mollify local sentiment by speaking euphemistically of the ‘removal’ instead of the chopping down of the tree. Moreover, he indicates that the Council policy reflects both ‘consultation with the public and extensive deliberation at the executive level’, thus suggesting that community members are not excluded from decisions that directly affect them. Furthermore, to retain a hold on public support, it is important that the Council are not seen as deficient in environmental awareness. For this reason, Councillor Chang opens by saying that the Council ‘recognises the significance of trees’ and goes on to maintain that ‘every effort was made’ to save the Federation Elm. Though he pointedly ignores the historical significance of that specific tree, he insists that the Council is committed to both ‘sustainable environmental practices’ and Garrickville’s ‘long-term interests and future planning needs’. This orientation towards the future attempts to make the Council sound both progressive and prudent, rather than motivated primarily by revenue as the headline ‘Growth or greed in Garrickville?’ might suggest.

It is clear that both Jennifer Erikson and Councillor Paul Chang see the inflammatory potential of the Federation Elm as a local issue. However, where Erikson hopes to use the tree removal incident to galvanise resentment towards the Council and recruit support for her organisation, Councillor Chang wants to prove that the Council acted responsibly and in the interests of all residents. Although both authors are motivated by a sense of duty, Councillor Chang seeks to sway public perception on behalf of his employer, whereas Erikson is impelled by a strong personal commitment to environmental causes in her community. Hence, Erikson adopts a more individual voice and Councillor Chang stays well within the confines of bureaucratic phraseology.

ASSESSOR'S COMMENTARY

The upper mid-range response reflects a strong grasp of each author's arguments and fluently integrates evidence to support this. The essay successfully relates the graphic to the concerns expressed in the stimulus material. Although some examples are analysed using metalanguage, there are missed opportunities to connect these to the authors' broader contentions, and there is a tendency to use quotes to summarise arguments rather than as language to be analysed. These omissions prevent the essay from achieving a high-range mark. The essay attempts to explore the connotations of 'senseless vandalism' and 'optimal balanced outcomes', but there is not enough of this type of analysis. The essay deals well with considerations of audience, but lacks the skillful use of metalanguage seen in the high-level response. The thorough understanding of points of view and the precise selection of quotes and examples are typical of an upper mid-range response. A greater emphasis on how and why this language aids in the authors' attempted persuasion of the target audience would elevate this to a high-level response.

The high-range response also provides a close examination of both argument and language, but shows greater facility in explaining how each point of view is constructed. The analysis draws from the scope of material presented but is appropriately selective and does not labour examples. For example, the essay devotes very little time to the graphics, but concisely conveys how the visual material supports the assertions made by Jennifer Erikson. Similarly, the essay discusses the use of a 'plural voice that gathers together "all in Garrickville"' but does not offer an exhaustive listing of instances of inclusive language. Even though the more obvious features of both articles are not overlooked, a greater proportion of time is spent following up matters that require some subtlety of analysis, such as the personification of the Federation Elm. A further strength of this essay is the attention devoted to the contribution of small details to the disparagement of the Council. For example, in analysing the phrase 'Even the Council admits [the importance of trees]', the modifying power of the adverb 'even' is noted.

The high-range response displays a greater awareness of the characteristics of bureaucratic language than the upper mid-range response and demonstrates a sound grasp of why Councillor Chang makes use of euphemisms to placate angry locals. The analysis provides astute commentary on Councillor Chang's attempt to deflect readers' attention away from topics that he prefers to downplay, such as the historical significance of the Federation Elm. This is succinctly condensed in the assertion that Councillor Chang is 'attempting to limit damage to the Council's reputation'. The high-range response also features a greater control of the material and a deeper exploration of implication. This is made possible by a wide-ranging command of vocabulary, which is suited to the task but is not intrusively conspicuous. The high-range response often stands back from the stimulus material and presents it in perspective. Most importantly, the analysis frequently revisits both authors' contentions and considers how these continually shape language choices. The essay shows a pleasing sense of completion and smoothly transitions between examples and authors. It maintains a steady focus on why certain language supports a persuasive intent, and its consistent use of metalanguage frames the discussion, which effectively enables efficient, insightful analysis.