



RADLEY

Common Entrance 2025

(A series of detailed reports to provide feedback for Preparatory Schools)

Subject reports

ENGLISH

Writing Papers

The overall standard demonstrated by candidates was very competent, with performance reflecting the strong foundation work undertaken. Almost all candidates displayed accurate sentence structure throughout their responses, indicating solid grammatical understanding and technical control. This consistency in basic writing mechanics provided a stable platform from which students could develop their ideas and engage with the examination tasks.

Creative tasks that involved extended narratives revealed both strengths and areas for improvement. While students showed enthusiasm for storytelling and demonstrated imagination in their initial concepts, many responses exhibited a tendency to lose control over narrative structure as pieces developed. This pattern was particularly evident in longer responses where students appeared to struggle with maintaining coherence and direction throughout their writing.

A recurring issue in creative responses was the overuse of dialogue at the expense of descriptive writing. In numerous cases, excessive dialogue inhibited the development of atmospheric description and scene-setting, resulting in narratives that felt underdeveloped in terms of their fictional worlds.

Narratives and descriptions that devolved into violence consistently proved less effective than those exploring other themes and conflicts. Students who chose violent scenarios often struggled to maintain literary quality and frequently relied on shock value rather than skillful writing craft. Conversely, responses that drew upon concrete details, particularly those incorporating places and events that felt part of the writer's genuine experience, demonstrated considerably more strength and authenticity.

The examination responses showcased extensive vocabulary knowledge across the cohort, with many students demonstrating impressive lexical range. However, this strength occasionally became a weakness when students appeared to be grasping for the most 'impressive' sounding words, leading to odd expressions and inappropriate word choices that disrupted the flow and clarity of their writing.

Introduction

Thank you for everything you've done to prepare boys for the Common Entrance Examination again this year. There is a view, in some quarters, that the Exam isn't as valuable as it once was. That is not the view at Radley College. For us, the Common Entrance is as important as ever: we want the boys coming to us to work as hard as they can right up until the time that they join us, and we value, hugely, the breadth and depth of the course you teach them. We also know that an exam at the end of a course is always the best way to encourage pupils to work hard! We are pleased to mark the papers ourselves and we do so because the boys' work is a marker of the care and effort that you show for their academic progress.

We hope that the attached reports will help give boys specific and actionable advice for how they can improve in the future, as well as an overall analysis of their performance in 2025.

Thank you for everything you do to nurture these boys' minds and lay the foundation for the rest of their education. They are a credit to you.

Best wishes

Jonathan Porter MA (Cantab.)



The more transactional tasks (letter, magazine and speech writing) clearly reflected excellent teaching preparation. Students demonstrated solid understanding of appropriate formats, structures, and conventions for these types of writing. The consistency of approach across responses indicated that these elements had been thoroughly taught across the participating schools.

However, this thorough preparation led to a certain homogeneity in responses, both in terms of structural approach and content selection. While students were well-equipped with the technical skills required for transactional writing, many responses followed predictable patterns that, while competent, lacked individual voice and originality.

The mark scheme revealed a tendency for responses to 'bunch' around the middle of the assessment bands. This clustering effect reflected the impact of very effective preparation across the schools, enabling pupils to secure solid, reliable marks through consistent application of taught techniques and approaches. Students demonstrated clear understanding of examination expectations and were able to meet standard requirements effectively.

However, this same pattern of thorough preparation sometimes created barriers to accessing the upper end of the mark scheme. The most exceptional responses typically required elements of risk-taking, originality, and individual flair that appeared less frequently in responses that adhered closely to taught formulas and structures.

The results suggest that while current teaching approaches are successfully establishing strong foundations in writing mechanics and examination technique, there may be opportunities to encourage greater creativity and individual expression without compromising the technical standards that have been so effectively established. Balancing structured teaching with opportunities for students to develop their own voice and take calculated risks in their writing could help more students access the highest levels of achievement while maintaining the solid competence that characterizes the current cohort's performance.

Reading and Comprehension Section

Candidates generally demonstrated a solid foundation in reading comprehension, with particularly encouraging results in the multiple-choice section. The majority of candidates showed a clear understanding of the main events and themes within the passage, indicating effective literal comprehension skills across the cohort.

Performance in this section was commendable, with many candidates answering accurately and demonstrating careful attention to textual detail. This suggests that candidates are developing strong skills in close reading and are able to discriminate effectively between plausible alternatives when guided by structured questions.

While candidates showed good understanding of the passage's content, there is scope for improvement in precision when responding to reading questions. Candidates are advised to pay closer attention to specified line ranges and to ensure their responses address the exact number of points required by the mark scheme. This attention to detail will help maximise marks and demonstrate thorough engagement with the question requirements.



A recurring issue was the tendency for some candidates to over-quote lengthy passages in place of using their own analytical voice. Effective answers should strike a balance between concise, relevant quotations that serve as evidence and the candidate's own explanatory commentary. Short, targeted quotations should support and illuminate analysis rather than substitute for it. Candidates should remember that quotations are tools to prove points, not answers in themselves.

In longer analytical responses, candidates demonstrated solid basic comprehension and were able to identify key themes and character motivations. However, many struggled to identify specific and varied language techniques that authors use to communicate these ideas effectively.

There was considerable repetition in the techniques identified, with many candidates defaulting to metaphor or basic sound devices without exploring the rich variety of literary methods available for analysis. Candidates would benefit from expanding their analytical vocabulary to include techniques such as:

- Varied figurative language beyond metaphor
- Sentence structure and syntax
- Rhythm and pace
- Imagery patterns
- Symbolism and motif
- Narrative perspective and voice

The longer character-focused 10-mark question elicited some insightful responses, with many candidates demonstrating genuine engagement with psychological motivation and character development. However, the most successful answers were distinguished by their organisation and perceptiveness. Strong responses moved beyond basic character description to explore how authors craft character through specific textual choices, and presented their insights in a structured, coherent manner.

Some suggestions for future preparation:

1. Technical Analysis: Encourage broader exploration of literary techniques beyond the most familiar ones
2. Textual Integration: Practice incorporating brief, relevant quotations as evidence within analytical paragraphs
3. Question Focus: Develop habits of careful question analysis, noting line references and mark allocations
4. Response Structure: Work on organising extended responses with clear progression of ideas

The overall standard suggests that candidates are engaging meaningfully with literary texts and developing essential comprehension skills. It is pleasing to note that sustained and careful attention to close reading was common across most responses.

MATHS

Overall, the papers demonstrated a solid understanding and a competent application of mathematical concepts. There was an overall increase in the average marks across all papers.

Mental Arithmetic Paper

This paper produced a well-distributed range of marks and was a stronger indicator of candidates' mathematical ability than the other papers. The average mark was 30/40. The time constraint of 10 minutes for 40 questions demanded speed and precision, highlighting the importance of using efficient calculation strategies. The first 18 questions were mainly times table testing (8×6) or simple whole number computations ($105 - 98$, -6×-4) and most students scored highly here. The remaining questions were more challenging and required mental calculation techniques to complete them quickly.

Q20 and Q40, which involved cube rooting, Q31 and Q37, requiring algebraic balancing, and Q35 and Q39 calculating with fractions, were the most common sources of error.

Core Non-Calculator Paper

This paper covered a range of topics and featured clear and manageable questions, with a few more challenging problems appearing toward the end. The average mark for this paper was 82%. While candidates performed well in the initial seven questions, requiring numerical proficiency, the use of estimation strategies would have helped identify and catch some avoidable mistakes. These skills were needed in Q12, where pupils were asked to estimate the answer; however, many used the exact figures instead, resulting in unnecessarily complex calculations. Algebraic substitution and solving equations were largely done well, although the methods varied. While the preferred approach was balancing the equation, a few pupils resorted to trial and error. Some struggled when the solution was not a whole number, particularly when faced with a final step such as $8b = 20$. It was particularly encouraging to see pupils successfully apply their algebraic skills to create and solve the problem in the final question.

Core Calculator Paper

Similar to the non-calculator paper, the opening questions covered a range of topics, and most candidates performed well. The average mark for this paper was 79%. It was encouraging to see a strong level of competence in the algebra sections, with factorising being the only area where some weakness was evident. Regular polygons (Q10) proved challenging for many and may benefit from further review. Success in this question required understanding how to calculate the sum of interior angles, the relationship between interior and exterior angles, and recognising the equilateral triangle in part b). Q13, which focused on speed, was answered particularly well, with most candidates successfully converting decimal time into hours and minutes. The primary issue lay in recognising the requirement to present time in either 24-hour format or convert it appropriately to am/pm. Q15 demonstrated good understanding and it was encouraging that most showed clear working when calculating the area in part b). Those that reached the latter questions, applied their knowledge well.

Additional Paper

As last year, this paper was challenging and required a higher level of thinking and an ability to apply maths in a variety of contexts. The average mark was 58%. A key feature of this paper was the requirement for clear and detailed working. Full marks were only awarded when candidates clearly



demonstrated their methods, not just the final answer. This was often the factor that separated the higher-scoring candidates from those who performed less well. The paper covered a wide range of algebraic skills. Rearranging formulae and forming equations were among the more challenging areas, with the solving question (Q5) proving particularly tough. Questions on volume (Q12), graphing (Q13), and speed (Q9) were answered confidently by the majority of candidates.

PHYSICS

The results reflect all the work done by Prep schools to prepare their pupils for success at Radley. More than just preparation for Common Entrance, pupils were prepared with great care to link Physics to the world around them. The responses where students thought about the situation practically as well as applying their understanding were really nice to read.

The Physics department marked 82 scripts, with 5 students scoring over 90%. The standard of answers was very high with an average of 73%. A good understanding of refraction was demonstrated, however some students may not have seen a concave lens before and drew the ray diagram for a convex lens instead. This is a concept we teach in our Fifth Form, so students who answered this question were very impressive. Where a student showed a weakness in an area, it did not tend to impact their overall score much.

It is clear electric cars are an interesting topic as many students explained that the batteries in electric cars use Lithium, which is a non-renewable resource. This was not on the mark scheme, however this was rewarded as an acceptable answer, in fact it was a topic of a sermon from the Warden only last week. An area many students struggled in was Electricity. At the end of the paper it was quite tricky and students had a good understanding of the theory, but were just unable to use the key terms voltage, current and resistance.

CHEMISTRY

This year's paper covered the most common and important points in the specification: acids, combustion, rates, chromatography and other separation techniques, some particle theory and formulae along with basic vocabulary and some maths. The mean score was slightly higher than last year. Interestingly, Q1 was answered most successfully while Q3 (chromatography) and Q8 (rates) were answered least well. These were all experimental-based topics.

Q1, Q2a) and b), Q3a), Q5a) and Q6 were generally answered well. Necessary details were often lacking in Q2cii), di) and dii), Q3b) and Q8f).

Other questions proved more problematic. The calculation of the correct R_f value in Q3c) demanded the correct measurement of distances which was not always achieved. Division, on the other hand, was often correct.

Q4b) needed to include the change of state from a liquid to a gas followed by diffusion of the gas.

Q5b) very often gave a wrong answer of sulphate.



The combustion question was perhaps not as well answered as expected. The fact that water is produced was not always recognised and some candidates stated that carbon dioxide would form the black deposit in Q7d). However, a good proportion of candidates arranged tubes A and B in the right order, often with a good explanation.

Q8a) asked about the start of the reaction and boys sometimes simply referred to the string in general (to avoid a pre-mature reaction before the stop clock had been started) but did not recognise to cut the string. Other candidates thought that the calcium carbonate burned in this experiment. A good number of candidates did not read the correct value from the graph in Q8di).

In summary, many boys showed a good understanding of the material they covered while others struggled to recall basic knowledge or important facts of an experiment.

BIOLOGY

Q1 A very easy opening question. The most common mistake was not selecting answer d) *the intercoastal muscles contract* and so some students had not learnt the correct sequence of events during the process of inhalation.

Q2 Another easy matching exercise for which students scored highly. The correct functions of the cell membrane and cell wall were often mixed up.

Q3a) Most students struggled to provide unique characteristics of insects and did not know that insects have three body parts; the head, thorax and abdomen.

Q3b) Many students knew that carbon dioxide turns limewater milky/cloudy (try to encourage cloudy for GCSE). However, some lost marks for stating that a lack of carbon dioxide would keep limewater CLEAR. A very common misconception was seen in the question asking about an appropriate control. Hardly any students said that the experiment should be run with the exact same equipment but without the locusts in Flask C. More emphasis on teaching what a proper control to any experiment should be would have been beneficial to students.

Q4 Generally well answered. The most common misconception was confusing 'egestion' for 'excretion' and losing the mark for Part d).

Q5 This question was answered very well by most pupils with over 80% scoring full marks (7/7). Those that made mistakes got their trophic levels wrong with primary consumers mixed up with secondary consumers and vice versa.

Q6b) A common mistake was not knowing when ovulation occurred during the menstrual cycle.

Q6d) Not all students included data to reinforce the pattern of data identified.

Q6e) Difficult question in which students had to make the connection between the effect of a narrowed blood vessel in the umbilical cord on the baby and the reduction in blood flow and the associated consequences. Students were not always good at linking their ideas together in a logical sequence eg Less oxygen = less aerobic respiration = less energy released for growth.



Q7 Overall most students scored well on this question.

Q7a) The most common incorrect answer was 'nutrients' (or 'nutrience') for third gap

Q7b) Needed to stress MORE photosynthesis and MORE OXYGEN to achieve the marks.

Q7c) Many students put volume/amount of water. 'DEPTH of water' was not in the marks scheme, however we accepted this answer to give the benefit of the doubt.

Q7d) Some very good answers. Some were a bit mixed up in their recall of the steps and at what stages ethanol, water and iodine should be added.

FRENCH

The results of the four components of the examination varied significantly. On the whole, candidates performed very well in the Listening section this year, with a third of candidates scoring over 80%. As last year, the text-based task caused some difficulty in the Speaking section, but the roleplays and conversation elements were handled confidently by most. The Reading exam was tackled well across the board, with many candidates scoring full marks in sections 1-3. However, a couple of red herrings in the final two sections, plus the specific nature of the vocab: les auteurs, les éditeurs, les libraires et les bibliothécaires, caught many out. Section 1 of the Writing paper gave light to some confident verb conjugation in the present and near future tenses, apart from vouloir in the third person plural form, which was very rarely correct. Many did not know to follow the negative with de in Q1, but adjective position and agreements in Q3 and Q4 were generally accurate, which was pleasing to see. In both sections 1 and 2, as has been the case in previous years, a significant number of candidates misspelt words which were provided in the French rubric, which negatively affects the accuracy mark. The e-mail was confidently attempted by many, with salutations and a clear structure. Some candidates attempted all five bullet points, which caused them to over-run the word count significantly. Inaccuracies were found in the use of accents and in conjugation of the perfect tense, but it was encouraging to see many of the strongest candidates successfully attempting to write in both past and future tenses, and including a range of structures and idioms, thus accessing the top band of the marks available for Quality of Language.

SPANISH

Overall, candidates demonstrated a solid level of proficiency in Spanish. Comprehension skills were generally strong, reflecting a good understanding of the language. Writing ability varied across the group; while some responses were somewhat underdeveloped with a limited range of ideas, others displayed excellent range and strong control of language. Common issues included tense errors and gaps in topic-specific vocabulary. There was also evidence of a better grasp of basic structures compared to previous years. With continued focus on expanding vocabulary and developing ideas more fully, candidates are well-positioned for further academic progress in Spanish.

HISTORY

Sixty candidates sat the paper. Some of those scored highly and showed great promise.

The unseen evidence question was answered moderately well, with most candidates getting over 10/20. However, most candidates were limited to one mark for Q1 because they inferred only one point from the source rather than two.

On Q2, most candidates were able to see the differences between Source A and Source B, though, again, often only one. Very few candidates were able to identify any similarities, so answers were chiefly in the Level 2 category.

Q3 saw many generalised or supported answers which lacked judgement without any, or limited, substantiation. This helped differentiate the stronger candidates who were able to give more focused answers which showed reasoned judgement and sound substantiation.

In the essay section, students were generally able to tackle all three parts of the question. In Part a), whilst some candidates lost marks due to only considering one aspect, most were held back by a lack of concrete detail linking back to the question. Others failed to read the question carefully. For example, some candidates gave two key events of the Battle of Trafalgar, when the question asked for two key events leading to the Battle of Trafalgar.

For Part b), candidates often did not receive full marks because they only considered one factor rather than two or three. Some failed to clarify which was the main reason or consequence of the subject in question which provided a point of differentiation. Again, as with Part a), detail was sometimes sparse.

For Part c), the long essay, the stronger candidates made sure that their structure enabled an evaluation of different factors. Some answers failed to maintain an analytical approach and slipped into narration, thus losing sight of the question; this was a significant point of differentiation. Finally, sufficient concrete detail appropriate to the question set needed to be deployed in order to access the top marks.

GEOGRAPHY

The geography grades were based solely on the examination, as not all schools submitted fieldwork. Fieldwork remains a crucial component at GCSE and A Level, so familiarity with enquiry-based learning is strongly encouraged at prep school.

The exam included many 1-mark questions, which effectively tested core knowledge. Generally, these were done very well. However, performance was weaker on the longer 3 to 6-mark questions. Many students struggled to structure their responses according to the command words.

Section A: Location Knowledge

Performance varied widely. Many students were unfamiliar with the Prime Meridian line.



Section B: Ordnance Survey Map Work

Most students performed well here, but answers to Q7 (historical site) were poor, with limited use of map evidence included in answers.

Section C: Physical Geography

This was generally well answered, though some struggled to explain how extreme weather may increase future weather hazards for Q1c), as the structure to the answer was poor. This was present in question Q1d). The 'describe' command word proved challenging.

Q2b) revealed confusion over river load - few could clearly explain changes in size and shape effectively. Many also lacked knowledge of erosional and depositional landforms in Q2d).

Responses to the waterfall formation question at Q2e) were mixed, with strong answers following a clear step-by-step structure.

Section D: Human and Environmental Geography

Generally answered well. However, Q2c) posed difficulties - many simply recited the newspaper article, rather than analysing it or applying their knowledge. Structured responses were mostly lacking.

Students should focus on structuring answers clearly, using the number of lines as a guide for depth. Proper grammar, including capital letters for place names and the use of full sentences remains essential.

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY and RELIGION

A total of 43 candidates sat the Theology, Philosophy and Religion paper this year, with grades ranging from A* to C. The overall standard was encouraging, with biblical literacy notably strong in contrast to the recent scholarship paper.

For Qa) the majority of candidates opted to write about miracles. The strongest responses demonstrated a detailed understanding of specific miracles, effectively describing both the context and significance. Another popular choice was the topic of disobedience, with many candidates writing about the murder of Abel. These answers were generally well-handled, with clear summaries of key events and thoughtful reflections on their consequences. Weaker answers tended to be brief and failed to register a good level of detail.

Qb) proved more challenging, particularly questions on just war theory, which were less well understood. As a result, marks in this section were generally lower. However, some candidates showed excellent knowledge when answering questions on figures such as Martin Luther King and David Hume, as well as in topics like Life and Death. The best answers were able to tie in the significance of the topic, and used key terminology in their answers, for example, God's omnipotence.

In Qc) the best responses used carefully chosen examples to enhance the arguments that they made. The strongest answers demonstrated the ability to consider both sides of an argument before reaching a clear, well-reasoned conclusion. Weaker answers tended to only develop



perspectives on one side of the debate without proper consideration of potential counter-arguments.

Across all sections, good written English was essential. The highest-scoring candidates not only showed strong subject knowledge but also expressed their ideas clearly, confidently, and with appropriate structure.

LATIN

Level 1

The paper seemed accessible to all but the weakest candidates, with the majority scoring over 50%.

Q1 Good knowledge of the vocabulary distinguished the best candidates; *malus*, *bene*, *miserunt*, *saepe* were not well known. Many candidates took *auxilium* as a verb, rather than a noun.

Q2 Many candidates found this the hardest section. Too often, they were prepared to write sentences which made no sense, failing to let their imagination help with the words which they did know. As in Q1, vocabulary let several candidates down. Principal parts caused problems too, with verbs such as *dixit*, *iusserunt*, and *cepi* not recognised. Knowledge of the adverbs and conjunctions with no derivations was lacking at times: *sic*, *tamen*, *iterum*, *ubi* and *quod*. Consistency would have helped: many candidates spotted *parate* as an imperative but then failed to translate *pugnate* as an imperative, because they made *auxilio* a verb.

Q3 The best answered question. Several candidates who struggled with Q2 produced fair marks in the English into Latin sentences. The hardest word to decline was *templum*, with many unaware that it was neuter.

Level 2

This was a fair but testing paper. While a number of candidates produced creditable responses, overall performance indicated some common gaps in understanding of syntax and vocabulary.

Q1 was generally handled well, though candidates are advised to pay closer attention to the number of marks available and ensure their answers contain sufficient detail. The word *nobis* in Q1f) proved problematic, with many translating it as 'noble' - an error which was repeated in the translation for Q2.

The translation in Q2 was approached with success by stronger candidates, but many struggled with sentence structure, case usage and tense recognition. Candidates would benefit from routine parsing practice and ensuring that this is reflected in their English translation. These areas of uncertainty were also evident in Q3. A significant number of candidates were unable to recognise a verb in the pluperfect tense or correctly identify the case of *Romanorum*. That said, questions requiring the identification of a preposition, pronoun and conjunction were generally handled well. The question on *maiolem* proved challenging to all but the strongest, with only a few able to provide the correct positive and superlative forms.



Responses to Q4 were comparatively strong. Many candidates demonstrated sound recall of vocabulary and were generally successful in selecting appropriate endings, though noun-adjective agreement continued to cause difficulty for some.

Level 3

This was a challenging paper and a number of candidates, perhaps the majority, might have been better advised to do really well with Level 2. For all but a handful, the more challenging bits of translation, particularly the unseen, produced not much more than some correct vocabulary at best. Only the strongest candidates could cope with holding together both clauses in the quite long third and fourth sentences.

Q1 yielded the biggest proportion of marks for most candidates, but even here few approached 100% and many got 0/4 on fi and fii as a result of transposing the questions.

Q3 very much split the field again - the best few got most of the marks, but many missed out on a lot of relatively easy ones through lack of basic grammatical understanding. Even the derivation question proved too tough for some - quite a few thought a fugitive was a prisoner.

Q4 was marked as generously as possible but once again the best most could manage was some correct root vocabulary.

GREEK

As ever, we were very pleased to see students taking Greek (all Level 1). This year, we received six papers – slightly fewer than in previous years. The average mark was 75%, nearly 25% higher than last year's. Candidates showed a stronger grasp of the language's fundamentals, particularly in recognising and accurately translating verb forms. The weakest section was the unseen translation, where limited vocabulary knowledge was evident. Most candidates attempted to construct a narrative based on familiar words rather than offer accurate translations.

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

It was pleasing to receive nine papers this year, as in 2024. The overall standard, however, was somewhat lower. While some responses demonstrated a fair level of detailed knowledge, few candidates applied that knowledge coherently in answering the question. The most common weakness was a failure to read and engage with the question closely. A clear example was the Odyssey question, which asked about the characteristics Odysseus displayed after returning to Ithaca; many instead wrote about episodes from his journey, such as his encounter with Polyphemus. That said, the enthusiasm for the Classical world was, as ever, evident and heartening.