2021 HKDSE │ Paper 1 │ Reading

What's in the exam paper?

Texts

- The 2021 HKDSE Paper 1 contains multiple texts in each part — a feature last seen in the 2018 paper. This year's paper has a total of eight reading texts — twice as many as in 2020. However, the word counts for each part are lower than last year.

- This year, Part B1's combined word count (940 words) breaks the recent trend (2018–2020) of having more than 1,000 words in the Easy Section. Likewise, there is a drop in word count for Part B2 (of around 200 words) compared to last year. Only Part A's word count remains roughly the same as those of recent years.

- This year's Part B2 has three texts — the same number as in 2016. In most past papers, Part B2 has had either a single extended text (2013–2015, 2017, 2019, 2020) or two texts (2012, 2018).

- Parts A and B1 topics in the 2021 paper are easily relatable to daily life. Part B2's topic is less familiar, but should still be accessible to students.

- For the third year in a row, the topics in Parts B1 and B2 do not share a thematic link.

- The 2021 paper has a wider variety of text types than in 2019. The overall language level of the texts, especially in Parts A and B1, is one of the lowest seen in recent years. Although Part B2 contains some difficult vocabulary and complex compound sentences, the texts are much shorter than in recent years, so students should find them manageable.

- The 2021 paper marks the first time that a newsletter, a flyer and a transcript extract have appeared in Paper 1. However, these text types are fairly common and should be easy for students to tackle, especially since the texts in the paper are quite short and straightforward.

2021 HKDSE Paper 1 texts and word count

Part	Text	Title	Text type	Topic	Source	Word count
A	1	*Parking up at the Food Garage*	restaurant review	food	—	~338
	2	*The War on Big Food*	article		*Fortune*	~279
	3	*Newsletter — The Sustainability Plan of Star Resort, Singapore*	newsletter		—	~383
B1	4	*Improving our housing estate*	online forum extract	greening of a housing estate	—	~633
	5	*Possible plants for the residents of the housing estate*	flyer		—	~307
B2	6	N/A	historical recount	space exploration	—	~139
	7	N/A	article		—	~377
	8	N/A	transcript extract		—	~519

Part A

The texts are fairly short and do not look intimidating as the paragraphs are only 2–5 lines long.

Text 1 is a restaurant review of the *Food Garage* in New Zealand. The restaurant is distinctive because it serves healthy versions of classic fast food. Both the topic and text type should be familiar to students.

Text 2 is an article about multinational packaged-food companies suffering a loss in market share as more consumers switch to fresh and organic alternatives. The subtopic of the unhealthy nature of packaged food should be easily accessible to students.

Text 3 is a newsletter for employees of a Singaporean resort. It describes the resort's proposals for better food sustainability measures and for raising staff awareness of environmental issues. Students should find these subtopics manageable.

Challenges for students:

- Text 1's opening paragraph is not a typical start to a restaurant review as it starts with a description of the eating out habits of teenagers.

- Text 1 uses an informal tone that includes some colloquial language, e.g. 'worked like a treat', 'send you to a fast grave', 'zing and slap', 'moreish', 'knock-out'.

- Text 2 makes use of some idiomatic language, e.g. 'raised a hair on the back of your head', 'left a sour taste in your mouth', 'the pendulum has definitely shifted'.

- Text 3 is a formal text written for a specific audience — the employees of Star Resort. It includes some difficult vocabulary, e.g. 'clout', 'consortium', 'ripple effect'.

Part B1

Text 4 is an extract from an online forum discussion on using plants to improve the entrance of a housing estate. The familiar text type and relatable topic should make it easily accessible.

Text 5 is a flyer giving factual information on a list of plants. The use of a table format and bullet points make the information very easy to digest.

Challenges for students:

- Text 4 is an extended piece of reading. It is important to pay attention to what each poster contributes to the discussion in order to follow the flow of the discussion and differentiate whose views on the topic are for, against or neutral.

- Text 5 has a direct connection to Text 4 as it is the leaflet mentioned in line 37. An understanding of the points raised in Text 4 will help students better comprehend Text 5.

Part B2

Text 6 is a short historical recount of the 1969 moon landing. Students should already have some knowledge of this historic event and Neil Armstrong's famous quote.

Text 7 is an article that gives factual information on the process of terraforming to make Mars habitable for humans. Students may not be knowledgeable about the science involved, but they should find the topic generally accessible, especially if they are familiar with popular science-fiction films, books and video games that take terraforming planets as a theme, or if they have paid attention to recent news in the media about Mars, e.g. NASA's Mars Perseverance rover landing.

Text 8 is an extract from a transcript of a debate between two professors on the ethics of space exploration and terraforming other planets.

Challenges for students:

- Text 6 includes some difficult vocabulary, e.g. 'immortal', 'intrepid', 'culmination', 'fits and starts', 'celestial'.

- Text 7 includes some difficult vocabulary, e.g. 'flourish', 'unrelenting', 'ingenuity', 'capital expenditure', 'photosynthetic bacteria and algae'.

- Text 8 uses a formal tone and features more sophisticated, formal vocabulary and expressions, e.g. 'immense', 'flora and fauna', 'left to her own devices', 'dire consequences', 'aesthetic qualities', 'subscribe to the idea that', 'intrinsic moral worth', 'endemic'.

Questions

Part A

- Part A features more questions testing 'Understanding stated information', 'Making inferences' and 'Following the development of a point of view or argument' than last year. While last year's paper had several marks on 'Identifying views and attitudes', the 2021 paper has none.

- **Q11** is an open-cloze paragraph in the form of a mission statement and not the more common summary (e.g. Q27). Students should pay attention to the instruction to write a word or phrase taken from the text. They must avoid making the mistake of writing an answer that fits the context, but does not appear in the text, e.g. for Q11iv, *children* fits the context, but the correct answer is *teenagers* (line 1).

- **Q12** focuses on the idiomatic phrase 'win you back'. Students need to understand the main idea of the paragraph (i.e. what the food giants have lost and want to regain) in order to give a suitable answer.

- **Q15** is a vocabulary question in which the given word 'dislike' is both a verb and a noun. The prefix *dis-*, which is the same prefix as in the answer *disdain*, may help students find the answer more easily even when it is unclear whether the answer is a verb or a noun.

- **Q18** is a figurative language question that requires students to draw a comparison between the slow melting of huge icebergs and the gradual loss in market share that food giants have been experiencing.

- **Q26** features open-cloze sentences within a table format. Students need to pay particular attention to the instruction to use a maximum of TWO words taken paragraphs 2–5 for each gap, e.g. for Q26iv, *herbs and vegetables* may make sense in the sentence, but this answer would be incorrect because it includes more than two words.

Part B1

- As in previous years, B1 has a high proportion of marks for 'Understanding stated information', but this year also sees more marks for 'Identifying views and attitudes' than last year. There are also slightly more marks for 'Making inferences'. However, most of the questions that test these skills are not too challenging, e.g. Q42, Q45.

- **Q34** requires an understanding of the figurative meaning of 'You are all dreaming' in order to work out Crustyclown's attitude towards the issue of adding plants to the estate's entrance.

- **Q44** features two open-cloze summary paragraphs. The information in the text is clearly presented under headings and using bullet points. However, in the summaries, the same information has been paraphrased into longer sentences that link different points together. Students need to pay attention to the instruction as it hints that they cannot simply take words from the text to fill in the blanks. They need to make sure that their answers make sense in the context and are grammatically correct, e.g. for Q44iii, the adverb 'loosely' in the text needs to be changed to the adjective *loose* in the summary, while for Q44v, students need understand the paraphrasing in the summary in order to think of a suitable adverb to convey the same meaning as 'an ideal house plant' in the text, e.g. *grows well <u>indoors</u>*.

- **Q45** is a multi-mark question in a table format. For each mark, students must fill in two answers — one of which is from straightforward stated information, while the other requires inferencing. For Q45iii, students can refer back to the information about kids and excessive touching of plants in paragraph 6 of Text 4 to help them infer that the kumquat is not suitable for young children.

Part B2

- This year's Part B2 has a high number of questions that test 'Following the development of a point of view or argument'. Compared to recent years, there is a reduction in the number of extended response questions and an increase in multiple-choice questions.

- **Q57** is quite challenging as the answers in the flow chart are not in the order that they appear in the paragraph 4. Students need to pay attention to the headings in the flow chart and make sure their answers fit logically in the flow of the chart. However, they should be careful as some key words in the paragraph do not match up to the expected headings in the flow chart (e.g. 'One option' in line 16 seems to relate to the headings in Q57i and ii, but does not). It is more important to read the paragraph carefully in order to digest the information and pay attention to how key words have been paraphrased (e.g. *Additional method* in the flow chart is a paraphrase of 'could also be used alongside' in line 22).

- **Q58** is notable because the overall purpose (i.e. to explain) is given in the stem of the question. Instead students need to work out the main idea of the text in order to choose the correct option. In contrast, multiple-choice questions testing 'Understanding the purpose of a text' in previous papers focus on the verb describing the purpose, e.g. to explain, to inform, to persuade, etc.

- **Q63** is a True / False / NG format. In previous years, this format usually focused on one or two paragraphs of a text, but this year, it covers five paragraphs of a fairly long text. This makes it more challenging than in previous papers. The complex compound sentences in the text requires students to read carefully in order to choose the correct options.

- **Q65** test students' ability to follow the two professors' lines of argument. For the parts of the table where a stem is given, students need to make sure that their answers fit grammatically so they may need to rephrase information that they find in the text.

Marks and question formats

2017–2021 HKDSE Paper 1 breakdown of marks per question format

	2017		**2018**		**2019**		**2020**		**2021**	
	A+B1	**A+B2**	**A+B1**	**A+B2**	**A+B1**	**A+B2**	**A+B1**	**A+B2**	**A+B1**	**A+B2**
Short answer	15	23	16	19	17	25	12	13	17	27
Cloze	12	5	22	24	21	13	14	19	19	9
Extended response	20	17	9	11	4	7	5	8	4	6
Multiple-choice	15	11	17	17	10	9	11	8	21	15
Matching	12	11	7	9	16	14	9	14	5	3
True / False / NG	7	8	7	3	9	10	10	8	10	12
Table	3	9	5	—	—	—	14	6	8	12
Picture	—	—	1	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Proofreading	—	—	—	—	6	6	4	4	—	—
Ordering	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	4	—	—

- Compared to last year, the 2021 paper has a narrower variety of question formats. It is the first time since 2017 that the paper has not featured any picture, proofreading or ordering questions.

- Compared to last year, the 2021 paper has a much higher proportion of marks for short answers and MCQs, while the number of marks for extended responses has dropped slightly.

- This year sees a continuation from last year in the use of table formats.

- The combined number of marks for short answers, extended response and table formats has led to an increase in the number of marks for open-ended questions this year.

- Cloze remains a frequent format. However, only Part A clozes (Q11, Q26, Q27) require students to take words directly from the text, unlike last year when the clozes in all three parts required words to be directly taken from the text.

2017–2021 HKDSE Paper 1 number of questions and mark distribution

	2017			**2018**			**2019**			**2020**			**2021**		
	A	**B1**	**B2**	**A**	**B1**	**B2**	**A**	**B1**	**B2**	**A**	**B1**	**B2**	**A**	**B1**	**B2**
Questions	21	23	16	22	23	26	18	23	25	19	22	21	27	19	20
(A + B1)		44			45			41			41			46	
(A + B2)		37			48			43			40			47	
Marks	41	43	43	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42
(A + B1)		84			84			84			84			84	
(A + B2)		84			84			84			84			84	

- The mark distribution has been the same for four years running. The number of questions in Parts B1 and B2 have fallen slightly from last year due to some questions being worth up to 9 marks in B1 and 8 marks in B2. In contrast, the number of questions in Part A has risen significantly, resulting in more questions overall in combined Parts A + B1 and A + B2 than in the 2019 paper.

Summary

Overall, the difficulty level of the 2021 HKDSE Paper 1 appears to be lower than last year's paper. This can be attributed to the choice of generally easier reading texts and topics. The use of multiple texts in each part also helps make it more manageable.

There is a lower number of extended response questions than last year, but the 2021 paper has more open-ended question formats in the form of short answers and sentence completion. especially in Parts A and B2. It is important that students use their own words as much as possible and avoid copying too much from the reading text.

Compared to last year, the 2021 paper has a higher number of ABCD-type multiple-choice questions. There are also several varieties of question formats where answer choices are given, e.g. Q4, Q42, Q43, Q45, Q66. This may help make the paper overall appear easier than last year.

What's useful to know?

- The 2021 HKDSE Paper 1 shows the importance being able to deal with a wide variety of text types. Reading texts from newspapers, magazines, websites, etc. can help students prepare for different text types written in various tones and registers that may appear in the exam.

- Reading texts from a variety of local and international sources (both print and online) can help students better prepare themselves for a broader range of topics and perspectives. This can help them build up a wider range of vocabulary, and expose them to a greater variety of colloquial and figurative language. It is recommended that they read up on topics which may not be aimed specifically at teens, but which are related to their everyday life and environment.

- This year's paper highlights the importance of reading the questions *and* the instructions for the questions carefully. To avoid losing marks, students should make sure that they follow the instructions, especially in open-cloze questions where they may be:
  o instructed to use one word in each gap (e.g. Q27, Q44).
  o instructed to use a word or a phrase in each gap (e.g. Q11)
  o given a limit on the number of words in each gap (e.g. maximum of 2 words in Q26).

  They also need to pay attention to any instructions to use words or phrases taken from the text (e.g. Q11, Q26, Q27). If there are no such instructions (e.g. Q9, Q44), it is likely that some answers cannot be directly lifted from the text and instead require transformation or paraphrasing. Students should read the completed cloze to check that their answers are grammatically correct.

- This year's paper features questions that involve completing a flow chart (e.g. Q57) or table (Q65). To prepare for this, students could practise identifying and summarising key information from reading texts and presenting it in a table, chart, timeline or other visual format.

2021 HKDSE │ Paper 2 │ Writing

What's in the Exam Paper?

The 2021 Paper 2 follows the standard HKDSE format and is divided into two parts, Part A and Part B. In Part A, students need to write about 200 words on a given topic, while in Part B, they need to write about 400 words on one of 8 possible topics.

The following table is a summary of the questions in the 2021 Paper 2.

Question / Elective	Text type	Topic	Writing purposes and communicative functions
Q1 —	Announcement (semi-formal)	Introducing the annual school fair at the morning assembly	– Giving descriptions – Providing information
Q2 ⚥ Social Issues	Letter to the editor (formal)	Discussing sales of electric vehicles and suggesting ways to attract more people to drive them	– Discussing an issue – Making suggestions – Providing explanations
Q3 ⌨ Workplace Communication	Email (semi-formal)	Expressing opinions on the company's no-exchange / no-refund policy and suggesting changes	– Making suggestions – Providing explanations
Q4 ⚲ Sports Communication	Job application letter (formal)	Applying for the position of Assistant Coach with the Hong Kong Sports Foundation	– Giving descriptions – Making a persuasive argument – Providing information
Q5 ♟ Debating	Argumentative essay (formal)	Discussing whether social media influencers are more trustworthy than traditional media advertisements	– Making a persuasive argument – Providing explanations
Q6 ✇ Popular Culture	Blog post (semi-formal)	Describing an experience taking part in a social media challenge called 'The 21-day Gratitude Challenge'	– Expressing feelings – Providing explanations – Recounting events
Q7 ⚘ Short Stories	Short story	Writing a scary story about a security guard on duty one night	– Expressing feelings – Giving descriptions – Recounting events
Q8 ♫ Poems and Songs	Essay (formal)	Discussing old and new friendships and which ones are better	– Expressing feelings – Giving descriptions – Providing explanations
Q9 ⚉ Drama	Letter (formal)	Proposing an idea for a TV drama series about three generations of a family	– Giving descriptions – Making a persuasive argument – Providing explanations

Part A

Students are given the role of a student helping to organise the annual school fair. They need to write an announcement about the event to be made during the morning assembly. Students should find the task manageable because of the familiar school-based topic. They can use their personal experiences of attending a school fair for ideas instead of relying solely on their imagination. Written prompts are also provided in bullet points along with a poster with content details and related vocabulary items to assist with content creation. To some extent, this year's paper is similar to 2018's Part A, in which a poster and a mind map were provided as prompts.

Although this is the first time that an announcement has appeared in Paper 2, it should be fairly easy to tackle as an announcement is in fact quite similar to a speech, which students should be familiar with. The opening of the announcement is also provided on the answer sheet to guide students on the structure of their writing.

Students should be careful to use the appropriate tone to engage the audience since an implied purpose of the announcement is to encourage them to attend the school fair and/or volunteer to help out on the day.

Overall, this year's Part A should be similar in difficulty to previous years'.

Part B

Students should be familiar with the text types in this year's Part B. For example, an argumentative essay (Q5), a blog post (Q6) and an essay (Q8), which appeared in 2020 and/or 2019, are seen again. Although it is the first time that the Paper 2 exam has included a job application letter (Q4), the 2018 paper featured a question that was similar in nature, where students needed to write an application letter for a scholarship. A letter to the editor (Q2) was last seen in the 2017 exam. Students, therefore, need to be familiar not only with text types from the most recent years' exam papers, but also those from earlier years.

As before, most of the questions call for formal or semi-formal writing and, in general, the topics are relatable to students. Some teen-friendly topics include social media (Q5, Q6), friendship (Q8) and family (Q9), and the exchange/refund policy of a fast fashion company (Q3). The topic of electric vehicles (Q2) may look like it requires specialised knowledge, but this is in fact quite a hot topic that students are likely to have come across before.

What's new in 2021's Part B?

As in 2019 and 2020, information in this year's Part B is presented in bullet points. However, compared with 2020, this year's paper includes more guidance in the written instructions, mirroring the exam in 2019. In the 2020 paper, only one of the two bullet points was about content to cover, while in this year's paper, all of the bullet points are related to content requirements, providing more support to help students with ideas.

This year's short story (Q7) features a new presentation format — students need to create a story based on four pictures given, which they can use in any order. Though new in this particular style, the format echoes picture composition questions which should be familiar to students. Again, the images provide support, so students just need to be creative and make sure that their story flows well with the order of pictures they have chosen.

What should students consider when choosing a question in Part B?

1. Knowledge of the topic (including first-hand experience), to provide:
- sound, well-reasoned arguments
- detailed descriptions, examples and explanations

For example, Q8 requires students to compare old and new friendships. Students can draw on their own experiences to tackle the topic, while for Q5, they can draw on their experiences of viewing social media influencers promoting products online for ideas to form sound arguments. For Q6, students can draw on particular life experiences they were thankful for to generate ideas.

2. Knowledge of the text type, including:
- format and structure
- language
- register, tone and style

For example, in the job application letter for Q4, students should begin by stating clearly what position they are applying for. This should be followed by detailed descriptions of their background, qualifications, past experience and interest in the job. In the closing paragraph, students should express their hope for an opportunity to attend an interview.

A number of other questions require students to use appropriate language to express or argue a point of view (Q5, Q8), to recount events (Q6) and to give suggestions (Q2, Q3). As mentioned earlier, most of this year's questions require formal or semi-formal writing, e.g. formal letter (Q4, Q9), semi-formal blog post for a website (Q6). Students need to use an appropriate register, tone and style for these questions.

3. Specific question requirements, including:
- their role, the audience and the writing purposes
- instructions critical to the question
- information given to refer to
- which stance to take (if any)

For example, Q3 assigns students the role of a staff member in the sales department of an online clothing company, writing to the sales manager to suggest changes to the company's existing policy. Q5 requires students to discuss whether social media influencers are more trustworthy than traditional media advertisements, rather than simply expressing their personal preference. Q4 provides a job ad that specifies the main duties of a position. Students should demonstrate how they can fulfil them in their application letter. Q8 requires students to take a stance either for or against an argument.

What other things should students pay attention to?

Students should make sure that they:
- fulfil all the question requirements.
- plan their time well, using roughly 45 minutes for Part A and 1 hour and 15 minutes for Part B.
- pay attention to content, language and organisation as each carries equal weighting.
- allow enough time to proofread their answers not only to check that their spelling and use of grammar and vocabulary are correct, but also that the content is relevant and that they have shown awareness of their role, the audience and the writing purposes.

2021 HKDSE │ Paper 3 │ Listening and Integrated Skills

What's in Part A of the Exam Paper?

Situation and role

The Part A situation in the 2021 HKDSE Paper 3 exam is about World Expos (Tasks 1–4 focus on tasks related to preparations for a presentation about World Expos by student interns working at a company that organises public events). As in recent papers, students take the role of an observer rather than a direct participant. Returning to a format like the years prior to 2020, there is a clear situation around which students listen to recordings for the Part A tasks.

Tasks

Students must complete four tasks:

Task 1 — a note sheet, including a work schedule, for carrying out research on World Expos for a presentation;

Task 2 — a note sheet on a lecture about the history of World Expos;

Task 3 — a note sheet on feedback to draft PowerPoint slides for the presentation; and

Task 4 — questions on a group discussion about the presentation and World Expos.

Question types within the tasks are generally similar to pre-2020 past papers, mainly comprising short answers, tables, stem completion / cloze and open-ended questions. Part A has a greater total number of marks than in the last few years. Like 2020, the distribution of marks across the four tasks (*see Fig. 1 below*) is weighted more to Tasks 1 and 2, which are the easier tasks. A marked contrast to the 2020 paper is the absence of any multiple-choice or ticking questions and only a couple of marks are awarded to questions that require only a letter or number to be written (2 marks cf. 7 marks in 2020).

In Tasks 1 and 2, students have to read the prompts and given examples carefully in order to correctly fill in the missing information.

As in the papers in 2017–2020, students are given three minutes (instead of two in earlier years) to check and tidy up their answers after completing Part A.

Fig. 1 — 2016–2020 HKDSE Paper 3 Part A: mark distribution

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Total
2017	13	13	15	13	54
2018	13	13	13	12	51
2019	14	13	13	13	53
2020	16	13	13	10	52
2021	**16**	**15**	**12**	**13**	**56**

Audio

Compared with previous papers, a narrower range of listening skills are featured in Part A, with most questions testing the understanding of stated information. The range of audio text types is comparable with past papers, with three group discussions and a lecture talk. The audio features speakers with familiar accents (local, British, North American and Australian). The overall average speed of the audio is also faster than 2020's but not as fast as 2019's. With an overall audio recording duration shorter than that in 2020 and the increase in total number of marks, less time is given on average to answer a question and so students have a shorter amount of time to write down answers and / or take notes. It is, therefore, important to be able to take notes quickly.

Difficulty

The quantity of writing increases going from Task 1 through to Task 4, with gap fill and short answer questions featuring mainly in Tasks 1 and 2.

Task 3's Q37–43 requires students to note down a list of seven suggestions for amending the layout of PowerPoint slides with no prompts given in the Question-Answer Book to guide them during this section of the task.

Task 4 is composed of open-ended questions, with two containing stems (Q49–50) and a table that unusually requires students to write *two* pieces of information correctly (a decision and the reason for it) in order to be awarded a single mark (Q54–56).

Tasks 1–2 appear to be slightly less demanding than previous years' papers, though students need to be careful to write the information given that is relevant to the prompts in the tasks as the audio

contained many distracters that could throw careless listeners. In addition, Task 3's list of seven suggestions makes good note-taking skills important for completing this task successfully.

Task 4's Q53 requires students to make inferences from the main idea of the recording to determine if the story had a happy ending and to give a reason for their answer. Q56 seems to require more than a simple 'Yes' / 'No' answer in the column asking if the story should be included since the speaker suggests only including the first half of the story.

Like recent years, none of the tasks are separated into parts, though tasks are clearly sectioned with headings (e.g. Task 2's headings for the stages of the history of World Expos) and the associated audio is clearly signposted. Students should make good use of the preparation time to familiarise themselves with the given text in order to identify the sections as well as identify the key words in Task 4's individual questions.

What's different in Part A?

Task 1 is the easiest task with its simple language, with Tasks 2 and 3 slightly more difficult; however, relatively speaking, the level of difficulty rises noticeably for Task 4. Overall the difficulty level is lower than 2020's, which was itself much lower than that of recent years, with few questions testing the skill of identifying views or summarising information and most testing the understanding of stated information. This year's continuation of the same situation going from task to task with the same three main speakers appearing in three of the Part A tasks should have made it easier for students to follow the group discussions and familiarise themselves with the speakers.

What's in Part B of the Exam Paper?

Situation and role

The Part B situation uses a tennis tournament theme within the same company as in Part A, a topic that is approachable like last year's space adventure camp. As in previous years, the student's role is as a direct participant, this time as an employee of the company that is organising the tennis tournament, the Victoria Cup.

Tasks

Fig. 2 — 2021 HKDSE Paper 3 Part B: mark distribution and tasks

Part B1 *(Easy section)*		Part B2 *(Difficult section)*	
Task 5 *(17 marks)*	Complete a **Special arrangements form** for the Victoria Cup	Task 8 *(16 marks)*	Write a 120-word **email** to a charity organisation turning down its application for a volunteer opportunity and explaining contributions to be given to it
Task 6 *(18 marks)*	Write a 120-word **announcement** for the Tennis Activity Day	Task 9 *(19 marks)*	Write a 180-word **letter to the editor** in response to a letter to the editor criticising the organising of the Victoria Cup
Task 7 *(18 marks)*	Write a 150-word **letter to the editor** in response to an article criticising the Victoria Cup	Task 10 *(18 marks)*	Write a 150-word **email** to a colleague explaining action to be taken with regard to a publicity poster for the Victoria Cup

The basic format of Part B is similar to the 2020 paper in that the tasks do not have the same weighting *(see Fig. 2 above)*. This suggests that the marking will follow the 2018–2020 approach (one mark for each content point, with additional non-task completion marks for Language, Coherence and Organisation, and Appropriacy). The overall total suggested word counts for B1 returns to the higher 270 words of 2012–2016 and 2018. The overall total suggested word counts for B2 is the lowest it has ever been at 450 words (cf. 500 words in 2019–2020). However, like 2020, the task completion marks are evenly spread across the extended writing tasks with the usual higher weighting of marks allocated to the scaffolded task (Task 5) in B1. The task lengths appear to reflect the difficulty level, with longer tasks being more difficult.

Audio

The Part B recording of a Zoom meeting mirrors 2012–2018 for Part B1 in that it provides information for two of its tasks; however, for the first time since 2012, the recording provides information for all

three Part B2 tasks. That said, like in 2012, Task 10's point about Lara Taranova being the highest-ranking player, which is mentioned in the audio, could easily be inferred from understanding the general situation and information from the Data File. Like 2020, the audio length is comparable with the shorter duration in years prior to 2019, which was significantly longer. There is the usual clear signposting of the parts of dialogue relating to information needed to complete tasks for both Part B1 and Part B2, which should help students focus on listening to relevant information for their selected Part B section. All the speakers have either a British or North American accent.

Data File

As in previous years, each Data File contains an identical note-taking sheet and section-specific source documents. Both B1 and B2 Data Files each contain one fewer document than last year. The total word counts for the B1 and B2 Data Files are within the expected ranges.

Fig. 3 — 2021 HKDSE Paper 3 Part B: Data File documents

Part B1	Part B2
1. Listening note-taking sheet	1. Listening note-taking sheet
2. Instructional email (formal)	2. Instructional email (formal)
3. Email exchange (semi-formal)	3. Notice (formal)
4. Meeting minutes (formal)	4. Google forms (formal)
5. Interview transcript (semi-formal)	5. Meeting minutes (formal)
6. Newspaper article (formal)	6. Letter to the editor (formal)
7. WhatsApp message (semi-formal)	7. Phone conversation transcript (semi-informal)
8. Company webpage (graphical)	8. Newspaper article and comments (formal and semi-formal)
9. Job advert (semi-formal)	9. Magazine interview (informal)

Difficulty

In Part B1, the tasks appear to be progressive in difficulty from Task 5 to Task 7. Unlike in 2019 and 2020, only two tasks in Part B1 require information from the recording in order to be completed successfully, which mirrors 2012–2018's papers.

Task 5 is back to being the heavily scaffolded B1 task like pre-2020 past papers (it was Task 7 for the first time in 2020). It is generally straightforward, requiring short phrases or sentences to complete each space in the form.

Task 6 requires students to write an announcement for a Tennis Activity Day, with task requirements that are very clearly defined in a bulleted list in the instructional email. Students need to make sure their writing is persuasive in order to encourage the reader to apply.

Task 7's letter to the editor is fairly straightforward, with the two issues to respond to clearly stated in the instructional email. It is the longest task in Part B1 (150 words, 18 marks) and requires interpretation of information presented in TV listings in tabular format and comparison data presented in a bar chart.

In Part B2, the tasks also appear to be progressive in difficulty. Mirroring the 2017 and 2018 papers, the shortest task (Task 8) appears to have a reduced number of marks for non-task completion domains (Language, Coherence and Organisation, and Appropriacy), meaning that the proportion of marks awarded for relevant content students include in their answers is slightly higher than that for how their answers are written.

Task 8 requires students to write a short 120-word email to a charity partner to reject an application for the children they look after to be volunteer ball kids at the tournament and to explain what contributions will be offered to the charity. The information needed is sourced from students' notes taken from the audio recording and by identifying mismatches between the charity's profile in a Google Form and the job requirements in two straightforward Data File items. Owing to the sensitive nature of a rejection email, tone and register are important in writing an answer that will score high marks.

Task 9 is the longest task in Part B2 (180 words, 19 marks), requiring students to write a letter to the editor in response to another letter to the editor. Unlike Part B1's Task 7, marks appear to be awarded for restating the complaints from the letter, which is relatively straightforward. The responses to the complaints can be extracted from the students' notes, clearly signposted sections of meeting minutes and by following the discussion in a phone conversation transcript.

Task 10 is another short email (150 words, 18 marks) with nearly all the content coming from a single Data File item (a news article), which then clearly signposts the use of an online magazine

interview for the remaining content. Though slightly more difficult than Task 9, it is still straightforward. However, students need to use a tactful tone in highlighting issues created by another department within the same company, while expressing urgency in addressing the matter.

What's different in Part B?

For the first time in the HKDSE, the situations in Parts A and B are closely related in that both involve the same company (Events Horizon).

One piece of information (the consequences of fans breaking the noise rules) is shared across Parts B1 and B2. Although this did occur for the first time last year (with the date of an Open Day), this time the information was not as clearly signposted or as straightforward.

Although there is a significant amount of criteria-matching like in recent years, the information is presented very clearly with little to no distracter information, which should make the Part B tasks this year easier than those in all previous papers.

Despite the task completion marks seeming to be easier to obtain, since a significant proportion of the total marks comes from non-task completion domains, the use of an appropriate tone and register remains an important focus in students' written answers.

Unlike 2020, where there was a notable absence of informal texts, the Data Files this year has transcripts of informal conversations, informally-written comments on an article and direct quotes in the more formal texts, where weaker students may find understanding the more colloquial language used slightly tricky.

Overall recommendations

For Part A, students should use their preparation and proofreading time to:

- familiarise themselves with the information provided within each task;

- look for contextual clues that can help them anticipate what they will hear in the recording, especially prompts to help them navigate the tasks during the recordings;

- anticipate the type of information to listen for based on the given prompts and headings in tables; and

- check whether their answers make sense within the context of the task and the overall situation, as well as follow the style of given examples or keys (e.g. in the 'Date' and 'Person' columns of the work schedule in this year's Task 1).

For Part B, students should use their preparation time to:

- familiarise themselves with their chosen Part B section, including which tasks will require information noted down from the audio recording; and

- identify and familiarise themselves with the relevant sections of the note-taking sheet to help them anticipate what they will hear in the recording and organise it appropriately.

Before starting any writing task, students should consider:

- the text type, audience, writer's role and identity;

- the format, style, tone and required language features; and

- the purpose of writing and content requirements, paying attention to what information would be inappropriate to include in their answers.

Students should also practise interpreting / summarising / extracting information from charts, tables and other diagrams or visual elements. These features are often seen in HKDSE past papers and are likely to appear in future papers.

In order to prepare for unexpected or unfamiliar task requirements, it is a good idea for students to familiarise themselves with register, tone and style, as well as a wide variety of text types and colloquial / idiomatic language.

The correct use of tone and style has been important in recent HKDSE papers, with several tasks requiring students to demonstrate appropriate use of language to communicate with care and sensitivity. Students may find it helpful to familiarise themselves with argumentative / persuasive writing and writing that addresses problems, disagreements and controversial topics, for example, letters of apology and complaint, editorials and opinion pieces, to write with tact.

Students wishing to prepare themselves better for handling a wider range of question types and formats may benefit from revisiting pre-2012 HKCEE (Paper 2) and HKALE (Section E) papers in addition to studying the 2012–2021 HKDSE papers.