



National  
Qualifications  
2017

**X724/75/11**

**English  
Reading for Understanding,  
Analysis and Evaluation**

FRIDAY, 12 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

**Total marks — 30**

**Attempt ALL questions.**

Write your answers clearly in the answer booklet provided. In the answer booklet you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Before leaving the examination room you must give your answer booklet to the Invigilator; if you do not you may lose all the marks for this paper.



\* X 7 2 4 7 5 1 1 \*

## Resilience

My best friend, Mark, was a keen footballer. We played in my back garden every afternoon as kids, often down the local park, sometimes other kids would join us, and in the summer we never seemed to leave.

5 I often think of those long, endlessly absorbing days, game after game, sometimes until it got dark and we played by the dim glow of street lights. In the summer holidays, my mum would make a two-litre bottle of orange squash and we would pass it from player to player at half-time, none of us deterred by the fact it had got warm in the sun. My, it tasted good.

10 Mark never made it into the school team. He kept trying, kept going to the “trials”, both at primary and senior school, but he was just off the pace. The disappointment was always bitter. You could see it on his face. He yearned to play, to progress, to be able to read out a match report at school assembly (one of the honours of making the team). But he never did.

15 It has been reported that 98 per cent of those signed by English teams at 16 fail to make the transition into professional football. Many struggle to cope with rejection at such a tender age. Clinical psychologists report that many suffer anxiety, a loss of confidence and, in some cases, depression. These youngsters are often described as being “left on football’s scrapheap”.

20 It seems to me, though, that the number rejected is, in fact, far higher. After all, the sifting process starts from the first time you kick a ball at the local park. I was one of the few who made it into my school team (I captained it). But when I went to trial for the district team, surrounded by the best players from all the schools in the area, the standard was high. Parents were everywhere. I remember my heart beating out of my chest when the “scouts” arrived. I did not make it. I was crushed by the disappointment. How could it be otherwise? But I also realised that the race had only just started for those who had made the cut. Of those who made it into the district team, only a handful were picked by Reading, the local club. And of those who made it to Reading, only a fraction made it into professional football. Perhaps none made it all the way to the top flight.

30 And that really is the point. When we watch any Premier League match, we are witnessing players who have made it through a filtering process of staggering dimensions. It is a process that does not merely discard 98 per cent of those who aspire, but something closer to 99.9999 per cent. For every first-team player, there are millions of others, like grains of sand on the beach, who have tried, who have dreamt, but who have failed.

35 The majority, like Mark, never made it through the first lap. Others made it to the final straight, before dropping out. But this is football. This is life. Failure is an inevitable aspect of any competition worthy of the name. Without losers, there cannot be winners. Without pain, there cannot be joy. Without natural selection, there cannot be evolution. Failure is not the opposite of progress; failure is part and parcel of progress.

40 Take a step back and you will see that football is a beautiful meritocracy. That so many dreams are shattered is testament to just how many dared to dream in the first place. The skills are transparent, the opportunities exist. There is no room for family favours or cosy alliances. The best of the best shine through, whether they are from a tough part of Liverpool, like Wayne Rooney, or raised in grinding poverty in Uruguay, like Luis Suárez.

45 And the important point is that clubs have a responsibility to those who make it as far as the academies. They have a responsibility to create rounded people, with decent educations. Parents must support this approach, too, rather than exerting undue pressure on often vulnerable children. This is not just about giving youngsters a plan B; it is also about enlightened self-interest.

Youngsters who are educated and self-assured are likely to be better footballers, too. The Ancient Greeks understood this only too well. They created strong links between the gymnasiums and the academies and embraced the humane idea that the mind and body grow together. The German football system has embraced this truth, too. The clubs there want intelligent and confident  
50 young men. Such a cultural transformation needs to happen here, too. But I wish to make a deeper point. It is that we need to redefine our relationship with failure, not just in football but in life. We need to remind our children that losing is an essential (indeed, a beautiful) part of life. We need to emphasise the empowering idea that failure is less important, infinitely less so, than how we respond to it. Failing to make the grade at football is crushing. It is natural to be sad. But  
55 it is also a pathway to a new reality.

Tens of thousands do not make it to Oxford or Cambridge. Hundreds of thousands of actors never win an Oscar. Tens of millions fail to make it into Manchester United or Chelsea. But this is not the end of life. It is merely the beginning. It is an opportunity to conceive a new dream, a new hope, a new way of finding meaning in this curious journey called life.

60 I often think about Mark. And I am thankful that his failures in football, so important, so trivial, never deterred him. He created new dreams, new aspirations, and lived a life that inspired all who knew him.

Life is too short, too precious, to be derailed by failure. We have to accept it. We have to embrace it.

*Matthew Syed, in "The Times"*

**Total marks — 30**  
**Attempt ALL Questions**

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|---|---|
| 1. Look at lines 1–7, and explain how <b>one</b> example of the writer’s word choice makes it clear that his memories of childhood football are positive.   | 2 |
| 2. Look at lines 8–11, and explain <b>in your own words</b> why Mark was so disappointed.<br>You should make <b>four</b> key points in your answer.   | 4 |
| 3. Look at lines 12–25, and identify <b>in your own words</b> <b>six</b> points which the writer makes about young people hoping to become professional footballers.  | 6 |
| 4. Explain fully why the simile “like grains of sand on the beach” (line 29) is effective here.   | 2 |
| 5. Look at lines 31–35. By referring to <b>two</b> language features, explain how the writer makes clear his view about competition.<br>You should refer to <b>two different</b> features such as word choice, imagery or sentence structure. | 4 |
| 6. The writer tells us that “football is a beautiful meritocracy” (line 36).<br>Explain <b>in your own words</b> <b>three</b> points the writer makes about merit being rewarded in the rest of this paragraph.                               | 3 |
| 7. Look at lines 46–55, and identify, <b>in your own words</b> as far as possible, <b>five</b> points the writer makes in these lines about sport and/or life.  | 5 |
| 8. Look at lines 56–59, and explain how <b>one</b> feature of the writer’s sentence structure is used to highlight an important point.  | 2 |
| 9. Select any expression in lines 60–64, and explain how it contributes to the passage’s effective conclusion.  | 2 |

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

**OPEN OUT FOR QUESTIONS**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Article – Article is adapted from “We must dare to dream but life is too precious to be derailed by failure” by Matthew Syed, taken from *The Times*, 19th January 2015.

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