

## Sample - Process and Response

### 8693/12/O/N/12 - Vitali Vitaliev learns to drive

Follow these steps in approaching question (a):

#### Step One - Reading

1. Read the passage through
2. Annotate anything that you notice. This could, at this stage, simply be underlining interesting words or making note of figurative devices

#### Step Two – Assess your annotations

1. Attempt to link similar threads that you have highlighted, use some sort of numbering or symbol key
2. Use your combined threads to list your 4-6 major points of focus

REFER TO THE SCANNED VERSION BELOW TO SEE MY STEPS 1 and 2:

2 In the following passage a Russian man called Vitali Vitaliev describes his experience of learning to drive.

(a) Comment on the style and language of the passage. [15]

(b) Kevin, the driving instructor, writes his thoughts and feelings about Vitaliev's driving in his diary. Write the opening of the diary entry (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the material of the original passage. [10]

While living in Australia, I used to hate fire hydrants.

Melbourne, the city where I was based, appeared to have been invaded by them. Wherever you went, rows of the things stood nonchalantly at the kerb, dragging people and cars towards them. Their short vertical form was almost pagoda-like, but I didn't feel like praying at those small roadside temples that gave the impression that Melbourne was possessed by pyrophobia<sup>1</sup> and inhabited exclusively by pyromaniacs<sup>2</sup>.

I started suffering from that peculiar disease – firehydrantphobia – after my first-ever driving lesson. At the tender age of 37, I finally decided to learn to drive a car. I even successfully passed my traffic rules test, only slightly embarrassed to be doing this in the company of giggling teenagers.

I couldn't wait to be able to sit behind the wheel of my brand-new Mazda 121. Never before had I felt so passionate about an inanimate piece of technology. My Mazda though was very much alive: gleaming, young, beautiful and, yes, feminine. I was sure she winked at me coquettishly with her left blinker when I first approached her from the front.

Her insides smelled of leather and perfume, and the exterior was bright yellow – the safest colour, I was told. Her engine worked with short flirtatious purrs, which were driving me mad with desire to drive her.

The sad reality of my learner status was that I had to share my mechanical sweetheart with someone else, and I dropped myself into the driver's seat next to Kevin, my driving instructor.

'I never knew driving was so easy! The most difficult thing so far has been adjusting the mirrors.' And see: I am moving – faster and faster – my steady hands resting possessively on the wheel. Looking triumphantly around, I am driving, driving my beloved Mazda crazy with driving her. I am making a left-hand turn.

[Crunch.] I don't know, I must have pressed the accelerator instead of the brake. My little Mazda leapt up in the air and landed beyond the kerb. Kevin had no time to react. We were both alive, it seemed – but where is this angry hissing coming from?

Kevin, my Mazda and I were lying on our side, and as I looked over my shoulder I saw a thick fountain of pressurised water beating from underneath the wreck. My voluminous research had educated me that a car engine needed water for cooling – but so much?

It occurred to me suddenly that the hissing might be some precursor to the car exploding, at which point I promptly fell out of my seat through the open car door and into the mud-filled ditch beneath.

Clambering to my feet I could see that the 20m-high fountain of water that beat from the flattened fire hydrant was generously watering the nearby palm tree – not to mention the unsuspecting rare pedestrians on the opposite side of the road. Two playful rainbows were already dancing above the newly created sea of Melbourne mud under the stream.

From the corner of my eye, I spotted another palm tree – hairy, thick and solid – just 20cm from where the car stopped. Only at that point did I realise how close I came to meeting my maker.

It all fell into a dreamlike sequence of events: the torrents of water flooding the street, the arrival of the water utilities people, the tow-truck lifting my poor Mazda and carrying her away. *listing effect*

I could hardly believe that I was the source of all that fuss. After all, I was just trying to turn the corner, the first corner in my car-driving life. *person*

The (injured) fire hydrant was lying on the ground – a desecrated headstone on the grave of my illusions that driving was easy. It had probably saved my life by slowing down my Mazda's dash towards the palm tree.

An admirably courageous Kevin made sure we returned to the same corner in the same repaired Mazda several weeks later. I negotiated it again – this time without incident or accident. I was now educated and fit to transport the great and the good from A to B – right?

<sup>1</sup> pyrophobia: fear of fire

<sup>2</sup> pyromaniacs: people who deliberately start fires

*Genre = autobiography, human interest*

- Intro - Tone: humorous

*Purpose: inform, entertain*

- 1 Humour: self-effacing, pyromania etc, obsession with car (link to 2)
- 2 Personification (car, hydrants)

3 Irony, contrast

4 Struc? War? Listing?

## Step Three – Writing your commentary

1. Make sure that you are accurate and concise in your introduction – this focuses your writing for your entire response
2. As you work through your points, writing a paragraph per point, make sure that you embed your quotes
3. Do not feel that you have to stick to your original list – sometimes when writing you develop a new thought that fits better. Trust your instinct.
4. Edit your commentary; check for errors, read each paragraph and check that you have commented on the style and language, check that your paragraphs have links or flow naturally into each other

### REFER TO THE SAMPLE RESPONSE BELOW:

The autobiographical piece sketches the author's testy first experience of learning to drive. The narrative's structure is in the past tense, allowing for a sense of reflection and distance since the event. This construct provides space for the narrator to infuse his humorous tone, self-effacing at times, on quite a serious incident; a tone that drives (pardon the pun) this human interest piece as the author's purpose appears to be informing the readers through light-hearted entertainment.

Vitaliev, as narrator, presents this scene through his eyes and it is his intentional bias that operates as a thrust for his humour. The 'tender' age at which he embarks on this mission underpins our imagining of the entire scene. This is offset by the 'giggling teenagers', who remind the reader that this situation is already curious to begin with. Vitaliev's fixation with fire hydrants is pivotal. This begins, a hint of foreshadowing, with him stating that he 'used to hate' them, suggesting a subsequent shift of mindset. He then employs a metaphor to liken them to 'roadside temples', illustrating Melbourne's assumed obsession with them in his hyperbolic rant about the citizens suffering from 'pyrophobia', yet ironically inhabited by 'pyromaniacs'. This fascination is perpetuated as Vitaliev pokes more fun at himself through the extended metaphor when he suggests that he himself contracts a case of 'firehydrantphobia', a neologism coined in an attempt to convey his dismay in negotiating said hydrants.

This focus on the blessed hydrants morphs into personification as they stand 'nonchalantly', according to the narrator whose compulsion to drive into one is mockingly excused by their ability to 'drag(ging) people and cars towards them'. Their indifference contrasts with the impression conveyed by a sense that Melbourne is described as having been 'invaded' by them; this suggests a hostile takeover, reinforced by Vitaliev's disdainful reference to them as 'things'.

The narrator reserves personification for, contrasting to his loathing of hydrants, his 'mechanical sweetheart'. Structurally, Vitaliev dedicates a fair percentage of this anecdote to describing 'her', his 'bright yellow', 'brand-new Mazda 121'. The humour relies on juxtaposition of the elements: here we have a mature learner drive, foreign, speaking of his car as if she is a lover and magnificent despite her gaudy colour (ironically described as the 'safest' option and identical to that of the aforementioned hydrants) and the fact that a Mazda 121 is a starter vehicle, at most. But this merely serves to illustrate his bias, as love has blinded Vitaliev. His hyperbolic adoration has her 'gleaming', 'purr(ing)' 'flirtatious(ly)' and even taking on the qualities of 'coquette'. His 'possessive' hold on the wheel further illustrates this. The new car smell is described as 'perfume' and while this perpetuates the appeal the car has on Vitaliev, it also insinuates that the diminutive Mazda might be more of a ladies' car. Her indicators 'wink' at this rookie driver and tempt him into believing that he is ready to drive. This is not the case; yet another irony.

In fact, irony and contrast is Vitaliev's skeleton on which he has constructed this anecdote. The glaring (or should I say 'gleaming'?) 'used to' in the opening line is reference to the hydrant saving the narrator from 'meeting (his) maker' and therefore his 'firehydrantphobia' no longer rings true. The contrast of describing the hydrants as having 'invaded' Melbourne, but standing 'nonchalantly' also encapsulates Vitaliev's myriad of emotions when faced with these 'pagoda-like', life-saving 'inhabit(ants)'. Juxtaposing the actual crash is a further example of this contrasting effect he uses. This is structurally achieved through the lilting sentence as he makes a 'left-hand turn...' and is abruptly punctuated by the single word paragraph, 'Crunch'. The polarity achieves a stark contrast and is exaggerated through the rather onomatopoeic, voiced sound in the word 'crunch'. The final contrast comes when, despite his earlier hatred of the 'things', Vitaliev empathetically acknowledges the 'injured' hydrant as his saviour.

Structure does play a role in Vitaliev's ability to regale one with his story. He uses the listing effect to impress the sequential nature of the actual accident as 'water flood(s) the street', the 'utilities' arrive and a 'tow-truck' has to rescue his 'poor' Mazda away. Vitaliev infuses

parenthetical dashes throughout to impose his humour and wonderful detail, such as the 'desecrated headstone'. His use of well-timed rhetorical questions drags the reader in and sets up the story-tell construct. This is no better exemplified than his ending – 'right?' – where he leaves the reader concerned about his actual ability to drive despite 'negotiat(ing)' the dreaded turn and attaining his licence. This self-effacing ending provides a wonderful open-ended final line and reiterates the light-hearted nature of this passage.

### **Follow these steps in approaching question (b):**

1. Read the topic
2. Ensure that you are clear on who the writer is. In this case, as well as what format you are writing (in this case the writer is the driving instructor and the format is a diary entry)
3. Underline key aspects of what you have been asked to do (in this case, assimilate material from the passage into a diary entry)

**Details I wish to convey:**

- Near death
- Saved by hydrant
- Russian man's demeanour and age
- Odd love for his car, possessive almost

**REFER TO THE SAMPLE RESPONSE BELOW:**

Dear Diary,

I start by announcing my gratitude that I have the ability to log this entry. I was nearly undone by one of the more colourful characters I have taught in my lengthy career. His 37 years of life fooled me into a false sense of security and I blame myself a little for taking him onto the main road too soon. The glint in his eye, which I mistakenly took as excitement to drive, was reserved more for his actual car than the action. This was a canary of a car, in which this large Russian man looked overjoyed yet bordering on ludicrous as his hairy knuckles gripped the wheel in a vice and his head kissed the ceiling as he hunched over. I felt for him as we passed some school girls who weren't doing a great job at hiding their humour; some even pointed and guffawed. He noticed, but was soon lost in admiration at his Mazda 121 again. We started well and he confidently beetled down the street. Turning proved an obstacle too great and he ploughed into a fire hydrant. As the fountain erupted and we lay on our side, it occurred to me that the hydrant had saved our lives not as intended, but from a major collision with the palm tree a few meters away from us on our plotted trajectory.

by Nick Nel