Answer all the questions in Section A and one question in Section B.

Section A: Non-Fiction and Media.

You are advised to spend about one hour on Section A.

Read carefully the two passages, ‘Dead Climber’ (included below) and ‘Touching the Void’, and then answer questions 1, 2 and 3.

These questions will be marked for reading.

1) Dead Climber

Referring carefully to the magazine article, outline concisely what dangers climbers face. Use your own words as far as possible. [10]

2) Dead Climber

Explore how the article portrays both Erhard and mountaineering. In your answer, refer to both the presentation and the content of the article. [15]

3) Touching the Void

How does Joe Simpson convey his thoughts and feelings to the reader? In your answer, refer to the language he uses and the tone created. [15]

Section B: Writing

You are advised to spend about one hour on Section B.

Answer EITHER question 4 OR question 5.

This answer will be marked for writing. Plan your answer and write it carefully.

Leave enough time to check through what you have written.

Either

4) Extreme sports should be banned.

Write your views in a letter to the editor of the magazine which published Dead Climber. [40]

Or

5) A local newspaper is featuring a series of articles called “Extreme!”

Write an account for the newspaper of a time when you, or someone you know, experienced the extreme. [40]
I lolled on the rope, scarcely able to hold my head up. An awful weariness washed through me, and with it a fervent hope that this endless hanging would soon be over. There was no need for the torture. I wanted with all my heart for it to finish.

The rope jolted down a few inches. How long will you be, Simon? I thought. How long before you join me? It would be soon. I could feel the rope tremble again; wire-tight, it told me the truth as well as any phone call. So! It ends here. Pity! I hope somebody finds us, and knows we climbed the West Face. I don’t want to disappear without trace. They’d never know we did it.

The wind swung me in a gentle circle. I looked at the crevasse beneath me, waiting for me. It was big. Twenty feet wide at least. I guessed that I was hanging fifty feet above it. It stretched along the base of the ice cliff. Below me it was covered with a roof of snow, but to the right it opened out and a dark space yawned there. Bottomless, I thought idly. No. They’re never bottomless. I wonder how deep I will go? To the bottom...to the water at the bottom? God! I hope not.

Another jerk. Above me the rope sawed through the cliff edge, dislodging chunks of crusty ice. I stared at it stretching into the darkness above. Cold had long since won its battle. There was no feeling in my arms and legs. Everything slowed and softened. Thoughts became idle questions, never answered. I accepted that I was to die. There was no alternative. It caused me no dreadful fear. I was numb with cold and felt no pain; so senselessly cold that I craved sleep and cared nothing for the consequences. It would be a dreamless sleep. Reality had become a nightmare, and sleep beckoned insistently; a black hole calling me, pain-free, lost in time, like death.

My torch beam died. The cold had killed the batteries. I saw stars in the dark gap above me. Stars, or lights in my head. The storm was over. The stars were good to see. I was glad to see them again. Old friends come back. They seemed far away; further than I’d ever seen them before. And bright: you’d think them gemstones hanging there, floating in the air above. Some moved, little winking moves, on and off, on and off, floating the brightest sparks of light down to me.

Then, what I had waited for pounced on me. The stars went out, and I fell. Like something come alive, the rope lashed violently against my face and I fell silently, endlessly into nothingness, as if dreaming of falling. I fell fast, faster than thought, and my stomach protested at the swooping speed of it. I swept down, and from far above I saw myself falling and felt nothing. No thoughts, and all fears gone away. So this is it!

A whoomphing impact on my back broke the dream, and the snow engulfed me. I felt cold wetness on my cheeks. I wasn’t stopping, and for an instant blinding moment I was frightened. Now, the crevasse! Ahhh...NO!!
Erhard Loretan was one of the most celebrated mountaineers of his generation. Known for taking the most challenging routes without oxygen and at a formidable pace, he was only the third person in history to climb all 14 Himalayan peaks over 8,000 metres.

It was a puzzling tragedy, then, when he died on a relatively modest Swiss peak. Loretan was celebrating his 52nd birthday on a climb with Xenia Minder, his partner and an inexperienced mountaineer, when she lost her footing and dragged him 200ft to his death.

Though Loretan was killed instantly, Minder, incredibly, survived her fall. This week, she has spoken candidly about her feelings of responsibility for Loretan’s death.

In life or death situations, they have to make instant decisions, which sometimes have tragic consequences.

Mountaineer Simon Yates, for example, famously cut the climbing rope connecting him to his climbing partner Joe Simpson, leaving his friend for dead. The disastrous 1996 Everest Climb documented in Into Thin Air sees guide Stuart Hutchison discovering his teammates unconscious, frozen, and near death – but miraculously still breathing. He opts to leave them, in order to find others with a better chance of survival.

Incredibly, those who have survived such abandonment (like Joe Simpson, who somehow managed to crawl back to camp on a smashed leg) do not condemn those who left them. With a sport so risky as mountaineering, it is necessary to accept that you may have to be sacrificed, or that others may be unable to save you.

As a professional climber, Erhard Loretan routinely placed his life at the mercy of other people’s snap decisions, and eventually paid the ultimate price for his sport. And though Minder has never been held culpable for her lover’s death, the irreversible consequences of her fatal misstep will be impossible to forget.

Touching The Void
Many of us find it unthinkable that people put their own lives, and those of others, at the mercy of a split-second decision or an accidental stumble. Human beings, after all, should be programmed to cherish life. Taking such risks simply in order to climb a mountain seems absurd – if not insane.

For mountaineers, however, the only way to feel alive is to push experience to the limits, risk death, and know our vulnerability in the face of nature and chance. Responsibility for the lives of others – and dependence on them for your own safety – is central to what climbing is. It is exactly that sense of danger that makes it so profound.