

Section 1:

#1 The smell hit me before I even saw the ferry, fried shallots, grilled satay, something sweet like pandan and coconut drifting through the air at HarbourFront. It was that perfect kind of too-early morning when the food smells stronger and your stomach's louder. I grabbed a kopi and kaya toast from a corner stall and wandered toward the boarding gate, still chewing as I handed over my ticket.

Strengths: Your sensory descriptions engage multiple senses - smell, taste and sound. You've included specific Singaporean cultural references (kopi, kaya toast, pandan) that establish setting effectively.

Weakness: Sentence fluency → Your opening sentence contains multiple sensory elements strung together without proper punctuation, creating a rushed feeling. The comma after "ferry" makes it read as if the ferry itself smells like fried shallots, creating momentary confusion for readers.

Exemplar: *The smell hit me before I even saw the ferry: fried shallots, grilled satay, something sweet like pandan and coconut drifting through the air at HarbourFront.*

#2 Then something changed.About twenty minutes in, the ferry dipped forward, just slightly, like someone had tapped the brakes. It wasn't violent, but it was enough to make my coffee slosh and my ears perk up. A second later, we banked left, too sharply. Heads turned. A few people sat up straight. I caught the eye of a guy two rows ahead who looked just as confused as I felt.

Strengths: Your use of short sentences creates mounting tension effectively. You balance physical descriptions of the ferry's movement with human reactions that build suspense.

Weakness: Tension development → The transition "Then something changed" stands alone but doesn't fully maximise the contrast between peaceful normalcy and the disruption that follows. The physical description that follows could better capture both the subtlety and seriousness of the situation.

Exemplar: *Then everything changed. About twenty minutes in, the ferry dipped forward with a slight shudder, like someone had tapped the brakes unexpectedly. Not violent—yet—but enough to make my coffee slosh against the cup rim and my senses snap to attention.*

#3 I checked my phone. No signal. Not unusual this far out, but still. I noticed the guy two rows ahead again. He wasn't looking around anymore. He was staring straight ahead, face unreadable, hands gripping the seat in front of him.Outside, the coastline was gone. Nothing but water now, stretching out in every direction, blurred by the low, grey sky.

Strengths: Your pacing slows down to emphasise the growing isolation. The observation of the other passenger's changed behaviour effectively communicates growing danger without stating it directly.

Weakness: Detail development → The description lacks sufficient sensory details that would make the isolation and growing unease more visceral for readers. The empty line at the end disrupts the flow and doesn't serve a clear purpose in building tension or signalling a scene break.

Exemplar: *I checked my phone. No signal. Not unusual this far out, but suddenly unsettling. The guy two rows ahead had transformed—no longer curious but frozen, face blank as stone, knuckles white on the seat in front of him. Outside, the coastline had vanished completely. Nothing existed now but endless water stretching in every direction, the boundary between sea and sky blurred by a thickening, suffocating grey.*

■ Your piece creates a strong sense of mounting tension with effective pacing. The way you've established the ordinary ferry journey before introducing the disruption works well. To improve the substance, focus on deepening the narrator's internal reactions to match the external events. When the ferry veers off course, what thoughts race through their mind? Are they remembering stories of past accidents or mentally preparing for what might happen? Also, consider expanding on the communal anxiety by showing how different passengers react—some might remain calm while others panic, revealing character through crisis. Additionally, you could strengthen the piece by including more specific details about the ferry itself—its size, age, condition—to help readers understand whether this is a small boat or large vessel, which affects how we perceive the danger. The setting descriptions could be more vivid to contrast the peaceful beginning with the increasingly threatening situation.

Overall Score: 44/50

Section 2:

The smell hit me before I even saw the ferry, fried shallots, grilled satay, something sweet like pandan and coconut drifting through the air at HarbourFront. It was that perfect kind of too-early morning when the food smells stronger and your stomach's louder. I grabbed a kopi and kaya toast from a corner stall and wandered toward the boarding gate, still chewing as I handed over my ticket.

The ferry, Ocean Breeze 5, was the usual one. I'd taken it more times than I could count, quick, quiet, mostly uneventful. I found my seat by the window, plugged in my earphones, and settled in. The sky was a hazy gray, the sea flat and metallic. Everything screamed typical.

We left the dock smoothly. The engines hummed low. A toddler somewhere behind me was singing to herself. Across the aisle, an auntie was already nodding off with her arms folded. It was peaceful. Predictable.

Then something changed.

About twenty minutes in, the ferry dipped forward, just slightly, like someone had tapped the brakes. It wasn't violent, but it was enough to make my coffee slosh and my ears perk up. A second later, we banked left, too sharply. Heads turned. A few people sat up straight. I caught the eye of a guy two rows ahead who looked just as confused as I felt.

The captain's voice came over the speaker: We are adjusting the course. Please remain seated.

That was when the rocking became harder, enough to jolt a few passengers from their drowsiness. The toddler's singing had stopped. I could feel the unease settling like mist, quiet, creeping. A few people were glancing around, trying to assess if they should be worried.

The captain's voice returned, calm but clipped: "We are adjusting our course due to unexpected currents. Please remain seated."

I looked out the window. The sea still looked calm, but the ferry was clearly veering off its usual line. The ship made a sharp tilt.

Another tilt. This one sharper. My coffee cup slid a few centimetres on the tray.

Now more passengers were sitting up. A couple of them whispered to each other. One man stood and was told to sit back down by a crew member moving quickly down the aisle, polite but firm. There were no answers, just tight smiles.

I checked my phone. No signal. Not unusual this far out, but still. I noticed the guy two rows ahead again. He wasn't looking around anymore. He was staring straight ahead, face unreadable, hands gripping the seat in front of him.

Outside, the coastline was gone. Nothing but water now, stretching out in every direction, blurred by the low, grey sky.