

English Language AS Unit 2

Exploring the Writing Process

Samples of Work by Students from Case Study 1

UNIT 2: Samples of Work

Included in this section are extracts from work submitted by Loreto (Case Study 1) students for last year's AS entry. I thought it would be helpful for centres to see some examples of how students had responded to the teaching programme described in the Case Study. I have selected extracts from journalism interviews submitted by candidates which I think illustrate well the way the carefully focused teaching of this task at Loreto is reflected in the final product. It is not claimed that these extracts are completely flawless. However, the intention here is not to point out weaknesses, but to demonstrate how specific skills have been developed through targeted teaching approaches (see note below).

The first thing to note is that all three of these candidates have used a combination of carefully selected quotation and observation to present their subjects in a vivid and convincing way. They all have a clearly identifiable 'angle' on the subject of the interview, a key perspective which gives the interview a focus. In the terms of the assessment criteria for A04, by 'perceptive choice of style and structure,' they 'achieve complex purposes (including persuasion and entertainment) for the stated audience'. I believe that each candidate's success is due in a large part to the methodical way the skills and linguistic knowledge is taught in the centre. Each of the extracts is given below and is followed by the Principal Moderator's comments on its particular strengths.

Nick Rogers

Principal Moderator Unit 2

GCE English Language

(Note: If exemplar materials are required, complete folders including two tasks with commentaries, marks and the Principal Moderator's comments can be found under 'exemplar materials' at <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lang/Pages/default.aspx>.)

Student A: Life's Great Mystery

When we meet at the classy, stylish venue that is the senior study, I find her eating an apple. She greets me with a typical Claire greeting, "Hey smelly." In return I smile and, with the subtlety of a three legged elephant in a china shop, checked whether I was indeed emitting some odour, but no my Calvin Klein aftershave was still hiding my smelly teenage boyiness well. After a brief chat about what she'd been up to the weekend and the like, I dove into the questions. Claire is a self proclaimed expert on the most things so I thought I would see what she knew about boys. I asked what she finds attractive and what puts her off about boys. With a cheeky smile her eyes glazed over imagining her prince charming. I finally manage to get her to concentrate and she says with conviction, "Definitely a strong jaw line." On what she finds unattractive she guiltily says skinnyness is the main thing she finds unattractive then looking at the sheer horror on my face she adds, "Sorry Sam," in reference to me being of beanpole stature myself.

After cleaning myself up after a long crying session in which I had to be cheered up through a playing of Christina's Aguilera's "I am beautiful" we carried on with the interview. I asked her about a topic I am particularly interested in, something that I have long pondered whether they are a myth or not, whether she believed in soul mates. Well she put me straight very quickly "There is no possible way you could meet your soul mate unless you had at least 3 dates with every single man in the world...which to be very honest is very impossible. " She said it as if by asking the question I was a silly little dog who had just walked into a glass door after seeing the garden outside, with a look of scorn written across her face. Well there is all my hope of finding that perfect girl that I had always dreamt of gone.

I then asked her about plastic surgery because I wanted to see whether she was a girl who truly felt the pain of self consciousness and low confidence or if she was one of those who thought it was a waste of time and money as people, not just boys, but girls too, have huge differences of opinion. When I asked her what she thought about it she stopped to consider it clearly wondering how best to phrase it. A lack of self confidence and real lack of self esteem are issues that she is for being addressed by surgery, but if it is for vanity then it is pointless and not on.

Then we start chatting just like we always do, slipping into our usual banter, discussing our childhoods and I ask her for one particularly distinctive and proud memory that she has and she beams and then a little awkwardly starts this anecdote:

"This sounds stupid but in primary school I was quiet and shy (would you believe) and we were on a school trip in Dublin. A man taking a tour had asked a question, "How do we know this man is rich?" and pointed to a wax statue. Everyone in the class had attempted to answer but got it wrong. I knew the answer but was just too scared to give my answer in case I too got it wrong too. Finally he said "last chance" and I actually plucked up the courage to answer, "Is it because he can read?" He

just said, “yep that’s it,” and swiftly moved on. But it was my teacher and principal who tapped me on my shoulder with a big warm smile on his face and said, “Well done Claire, keep it up”. Don’t ask me why but I still smile when I think of it.”

She then giggles nervously and the bell ringing signals an end to our discussion and she has to run off to Geography. Clearly her mind is on something else other than the interview, however I can’t get my mind off her story. Now maybe I’m biased because she is my friend and because she never fails to make me laugh but some of the answers she gave were enough to reignite the waning faith I’d had in humanity since I started watching the news and learned of murders and rape and of course when Santa stopped existing (and that one really stung). I hope it had the same effect for you.

PM’s Comments

It is clear that one thing that this student got from the unit was a sense that writing can be fun. In common with the material used to model journalism writing at Loreto there is plenty of humour in this piece. However, the tone is not relentlessly light hearted and there are some more serious insights in this extract.

The ‘angle’ here is partly related to gender. Here the interviewer identified clearly as a ‘[teenage boy](#)’, is asking a teenage girl the kind of questions many teenage boys would like to ask a girl but might well be too shy. What does she find attractive and unattractive in boys, does she believe in soul mates, what does she think of plastic surgery, when was she most proud of herself. However, what intrigues the reader most is that unlike most interviews where the focus is, as one would expect, primarily on the interviewee, here the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is also foregrounded. This does not detract from our appreciation of the personality of the subject but it adds another perspective and insight into our understanding of her.

Claire’s actual words are not repeated at length verbatim. Rather, her views and attitudes are presented in summary with a few brief but telling snippets, ‘[definitely a strong jawline](#)’, ‘[sorry Sam](#).’ It is only in the key bit about the school trip to Dublin and the teacher’s praise that the whole anecdote is given. Elsewhere the subject’s views are summarised for the reader “[A lack of self confidence and an equal lack of self esteem are issues that she is for being addressed by surgery](#)” The self deprecating presentation of the interviewer adds to the humour of the piece, for example in the description of him checking that his Calvin Klein aftershave is still “[covering up his teenage boyiness](#)”. The subject herself is presented with a mixture of genuine affection, “[She is my friend and never fails to make me laugh](#),” and gentle teasing, “[Clare is a self proclaimed expert on most things](#).” However, the gentle teasing gives way to genuine empathy when the girl recounts her anecdote about the visit to Dublin. Part of the reason this piece works well apart from the skilful way the personality of the subject is suggested, is due to the sense that the interviewer is really interested in the answers to the questions. The interviewer’s genuine curiosity stimulates the reader’s. It persuades and entertains as well as informs.

Candidate B: Apples and Beetles

As I knocked on the door I realised it was the same make as mine, even down to the handle. A friendly greeting from the housekeeper welcomed me as the door was opened so I asked, "Is the priest in."

On this particular day I had been given the opportunity of interviewing my parish priest Fr Brian Brady. Doubts had cluttered my head: what if he gives one word answers? What if he is offended by my questioning? What if he simply refuses?

My worries where diminished, thankfully, upon being led into his office where Fr Brady was just finishing off some work on his Apple iMac. Not a common sight attributed to a priest I thought, but Fr Brady is no common priest.

I shook his hand and introduced myself, then placed my recording device on the desk, "I'll be recording this so you don't get misquoted," I assured him, a statement met with a light chuckle.

We started easily. "I grew up in the Brandywell area of Derry city," he recounted to me as I inquired about his early years. "I have two sisters older than me; I'm the baby of the family," he smiled. Indeed, the stereotypical 'reserved' priest image is being wiped away as we speak. I am told of an early memory of a young Fr Brian's sporting youth, "We all played football on the street where I lived. Also, down on the bank we had a wee football pitch where we organised matches."

It was refreshing to hear of Fr Brady's youth, but it was time to ask him his reasons for hoining the priesthood, "My home would have been a place where religion was very important. Where church practice was seriously attended to, where priests were highly respected and where family rosary would have been the norm. I also liked how the priests drove Volkswagen Cars; I always had a great love of the Beetle." It's easy to see how a vocation to God was such an attractive option to a young Brian Brady, with a strong family influence and the allure of owning his dream car. However, the age at which he made the big decision still eluded me; "Priests have been a very important part of my life since I was very young. I wanted to be a priest in primary school." I was slightly taken aback by this, in primary school I wanted to be an astronaut, but gave up when I realised I didn't fit the profile. In Fr Brady's case, however, he chose his path young and stuck by it, a highly commendable achievement.

PM's Comments

The unexpected and intriguing start shows that the candidate has understood the importance of the first few sentences in working to 'hook' the reader. At the same time it gives a specific sense of place and occasion, helping the reader see the subject in context. The identity of the interviewee is indicated indirectly by the interviewer's question to the housekeeper, 'Is the priest in?' Which shows awareness of genre and familiarity with a range of sophisticated journalistic strategies. This awareness has been developed through study and analysis of a wide variety of published interviews.

When giving direct accounts of the interviewee's responses during the interview the candidate selects direct quotes which give a convincing sense of the subjects own idiolect and indeed his Irish phrasing, 'a wee football pitch', 'My home would have been a place where ...'.

The angle with which the reader is invited to view the subject is signalled early on with the sentence "Fr Brady is no common priest". This angle is picked up later on in the fifth paragraph with "indeed

the stereotypical 'reserved' priest image is being wiped away as we speak." Tension and interest is also generated at the start of this piece by the questions in the second paragraph reflecting the interviewer's apprehension and uncertainty about how the interview will go which increases the reader's identification with the journalist and their curiosity about the outcome. "What if he is offended by my questioning?" As with candidate A's piece the audience's engagement is increased by the focus on the thoughts and feelings of the interviewer as well as reporting the responses of the interviewee. The occasional gentle touch of humour adds appeal ('In primary school I wanted to be an astronaut ...').

Although it could be argued that some of the authorial judgements might have been better left to the reader (e.g. "a highly commendable achievement"), overall, the opening of this piece shows an excellent balance of authorial comment, direct speech and narrative report of action giving a vivid and convincing account of a real interaction.

Candidate C: From Alley Cat to Top Dog

At eight years old, Oonagh R..... has achieved a great deal of success, much more than the average school-girl her age. She has accomplished most through her entry in various competitions. In fact, just last month Oonagh's entry was chosen when all schoolchildren in the area were asked to suggest a name for the cat-mascot for Alley Cats, the children's play area in the Jet Centre in Coleraine. "I was just thinkin' my name's Oonagh and I wanted the cat to have a name beginning with 'O' too." She continued guiding me through her train of thought "Ollie, Oliver, Owen ... OSCAR!" Oonagh certainly has been fortunate when it comes to winning but is it simply luck or is she an extraordinarily talented child?

Oonagh is dressed in fluffy pink pyjamas which match her bedroom. She welcomes me in, exited at the prospect of pushing back her usual 9pm bedtime. However she is a little on-edge. Her eyes dart around the room and she gulps as I close the door behind me. I explain to her that I am going to ask her some questions and it would really help if she answered them. She relaxes instantly as she can't hide the flattery in the smug smile she is fighting back. "You want to interview me?"

She fluffs up her pillow and makes herself comfortable, gathering the duvet around her whilst cursing the decorative cushions which get in her way. She cracks her knuckles in anticipation of the challenge I have in store for her. I ease her in, "How many competitions have you won?" She mouths numbers as she uses her fingers to aid her counting. "Err...8, yeah 8." She seems pleasantly surprised with the number and the pride is expressed with a stretch and entwining her fingers and resting them behind her head. She lists the 8 portraying an image of an all-rounded individual, with prizes for art, Irish dancing and creativity featuring heavily.

All winnings have meant a lot to her but she ranks winning a competition with her drawing of a sailboat when she was in P.1 as being the most important to her. "£100 and a boat trip," being the superficial reasons for her choice. When she stares over at her trophies they make her think that "{She's} a great person" and "WOW!"

Trying her best, practising a lot and encouragement from others are her keys to success. Oonagh revealed that she plans to begin practicing and training for this year's Summer Sports Day in April and that she expects to do well. She shares stories of her childhood, where a competitive streak

appears to have been instilled in her from a young age. "Me and Daddy used to have running races and he would be really close behind me clapping and cheering me on." She continues to shed light on how her upbringing may have moulded her into the person she is today. "Sometimes I think I need to win to be part of the family: everyone else is winning around me." "...I'm not double-jointed though," she says in a forlorn expression of inadequacy.

PM's Comments

This is another instance of a student who has learned to present a personality in a vivid and engaging way. The subject Oonagh is described in context as a young girl in pyjamas in her bedroom. There is again careful selection of extracts of direct speech and narrative reporting of speech acts which effectively convey the subject's personality. *"She continued guiding me through her train of thought, 'Ollie, Oliver, Owen ... OSCAR!'"*

There is a distinct angle on the subject which relates to her competitive instincts. This is signalled at the end of the first paragraph with, *"Oonagh has been very fortunate when it comes to winning but is it simply luck or is she an extraordinarily talented child?"* This question informs the whole interview. The direct quotes from Oonagh are usually related to this question of competitiveness, for example the anecdote about her father running races with her and the revealing comment, *"Sometimes I feel I have to win to be part of the family."*

As in the other examples from this centre, we as readers are given key descriptions of the young girl's appearance, actions and surroundings. *"She cracks her knuckles in anticipation of the challenge I have in store for her."* The representation of speech includes summary as well as direct quotation. *"Trying her best, practising a lot and encouragement from others are her keys to success."*

So, to sum up, a variety of methods have been used to represent Oonagh's speech and to convey her personality. This is supported by description of her actions and her surroundings. Questions arising from the little girl's fondness for competitions have given the interview a clear focus. It is clear that the methodical study of a variety of successful journalist interviews has enabled this candidate, like the others represented here, to produce a highly successful and entertaining piece of coursework.

