

GCSE

Edexcel GCSE

English A (1203)

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Examiners' Report

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General Comments

The papers were generally found to be very accessible to candidates. They showed an engagement with the texts, but some continue to have difficulty in maintaining a clear analytical focus on the specific demands of the question, rather than employing a narrative approach which does not always remain strictly relevant. Time for planning and checking is essential if candidates are not to lose marks through inaccuracy or carelessness.

1203 2F

Section A

There was evidence of a larger than usual entry for this Tier. This included some quite competent candidates, possibly resitting at Foundation rather than Higher Tier, who were capable of responding in some detail to the poems. Imbalance in dealing with the two poems sometimes meant that the candidate did not achieve the mark he or she was capable of: often, one poem was dealt with in some detail whilst the other was given only a sentence or two. Some candidates commented on only one poem (again, often in some detail); this inevitably affected adversely the mark they could receive. A common and familiar weakness was the lack of detailed language points; there was much feature spotting or inclusion of comments such as 'the poets used good language'. Some responses would have been awarded higher marks if they had been more detailed; it was obvious from the standard of writing and expression that candidates were able to offer thoughtful responses but wrote only very briefly.

Question 1

A few candidates ignored the wording of the question, which indicated the two poems to be commented on, and used 'Hide and Seek': this was obviously a prepared response, but one which could not be rewarded since it was not relevant. Other candidates showed an understanding of the set poems but could have developed the range of points covered.

Question 2

Some answers chose an appropriate second poem, such as 'The Send-off', to be paired with 'The House', in which unusual or unexpected events were clearly explored. In general, there could have been more reference to the language, but answers often showed a personal response.

Question 3

Candidates wrote fairly well on the two poems 'An Unknown Girl' and 'Once Upon a Time'. There was some confusion over the setting for 'An Unknown Girl' and over the references to 'Miss India 1993'. However, some candidates of Asian heritage responded well to the idea of making a visit from Britain to India to discover more about their culture. Most answers had the gist of a sound response to 'Once Upon a Time', but often failed to explore all of the possibilities.

Question 4

Candidates revealed a reasonably sound understanding of 'The Barn' and often paired it with 'Death of a Naturalist'. There were, however, answers which were unbalanced or which focused on very selective use of evidence.

Questions 5 and 6

There were very few attempts at either of the questions on the 'Nature' selection.

Section B

Question 7

Some candidates produced thoughtful and reasonably developed responses to this article ('Sport in Schools'). There was clear evidence that candidates had engaged with the text but sometimes the responses lacked development and, in some cases, there was little detailed reference. Many candidates did not address the third bullet point or became muddled trying to explain the Trevor Brooking reference. There was some evidence of personal response although sometimes this was detrimental to the quality of the answer, since personal experience and thoughts were accompanied by only limited reference to the article.

Section C

Question 8

Topics covered were generally choices in education, relationships, family circumstances, or those to do with sports or leisure activities. However, occasionally more ambitious responses stood out, such as choices over religious beliefs. The best explored all of the bullet points thoughtfully, but others were rather brief and often marred by errors which could have been eliminated through careful checking.

Question 9

Candidates were asked to write a letter to a possible employer, setting out qualifications, experience, their strengths and including an explanation as to why they wanted to do this particular type of work. Jobs selected covered a wide range from building trades to the music industry. The major problem was a lack of full development in responses to this question, possibly because of spending too much time on earlier answers. Many candidates demonstrated familiarity with writing such a letter. Inaccuracies in expression, spelling, punctuation and grammar were frequently evident.

1203 3F

The paper proved accessible to all candidates, on various levels. There was only one blank paper and one where the answers were written in text format, in one short paragraph for each question. Most answers showed that candidates felt comfortable with the material and confident enough to develop ideas.

Section A

Question 1

Overall the telephone leaflet proved a more challenging than the one used in the summer series. Candidates responded in most detail to content, tending to describe rather than evaluate. There was limited response to the use of language. Most comment was very generalised, and often unsupported by textual reference. Design features were often described, with limited comment (e.g. the use of colour was "good", with no specific detail.)

Section B

Question 2

The question's focus on school/college rules on the use of mobile phones was one with which candidates were clearly familiar. There was no shortage of ideas on the subject. Candidates had few problems taking on the role of a student in this context and sustaining it competently. Most answers relied for content on the bullet points and also used these (adequately for the most part) to provide a structure to answers.

Question 3

This quite challenging question produced some interesting answers. Most answers adopted an appropriate style and tone and showed some grasp of letter structure. The bullet points again provided a stimulus to content, and aided organisation, often a paragraph being written on each. Ironically the candidates' attainment was often limited by technical and grammatical inaccuracy.

Section C

Question 4

Again the topic was well within candidate's experience and there were some very personal (and occasionally engaging) responses. Most candidates grasped the idea of 'reviewing' the incident. More successful answers provided some balanced "self reflection", often expressed with a considerable degree of honesty. The level of technical and grammatical accuracy was very similar to that evident in answers to the other questions.

Question 5

There were also some thoughtful, personal responses to this topic, which seemed to reflect a dilemma that many candidates had faced. Overall candidates showed a reasonable grasp of an appropriate style and tone, which were generally sustained. Better answers offered some variety of viewpoint, taking into consideration the recipient, his/her family, friends and the candidate's self or adopted persona.

1203 4H

Section A

Question 1

This was the most popular question attempted. However, it was also the most inconsistent, with a number of unbalanced responses. Most of these showed that candidates had problems with understanding 'Where the Scattering Began', which some seemed not to grasp at all. There was better coverage of 'Electricity Comes To Cocoa Bottom', with some analysis of the language examples quoted.

Question 2

Some candidates had difficulties in understanding 'The Darkling Thrush', but those who wrote well on the mood of sadness and uncertainty in the central characters chose interesting comparisons. 'Death of a Naturalist' and 'Lucozade' were two appropriate choices for the second poem.

Question 3

Candidates had to write on the importance of cultural background to the central characters in 'An Unknown Girl' and 'Still I Rise'. This was another question where candidates found it hard to achieve the right balance between the two poems and often wrote more on the first. Greater attention to planning would help to focus on key points from both poems. Candidates were aware of relevant ideas in 'Still I Rise' but often failed to include more than a few limited examples.

Question 4

This question was quite consistently answered. Some of the most confident responses were on the pairing of 'Digging' and 'Follower', with quite well-documented examples of the family relationships explored and analysis of language.

Questions 5 and 6 had no responses.

Section B

Question 7

This section received some very empathetic responses to the question on 'Don't Leave Me Here to Die'. Weaker ones retold events rather than focusing on the question, which asked the candidates to explore Cathy O'Dowd's situation and the moral dilemma she faced. The best answers were those which kept strictly to the relevant sections of the newspaper article, with a strong focus on the difficulties and the final decision made.

Section C

Both questions had obviously engaged the candidates for they prompted a wealth of ideas. It is still important to stress, however, that sufficient time should be left to complete, and to proofread, this final question on the paper as one third of the marks are awarded for technical accuracy.

Question 8

Many candidates, in response to the question asking them for ideas for a new teenage magazine, gave thoughtful and imaginative suggestions, ranging from specialist topics such as video games to a unisex magazine, which may suggest a gap in the market. The letters were sometimes clearly structured but others contained ideas which would have benefited from being developed more fully.

Question 9

'What really annoys me!' generated very interesting and varied responses. One candidate, unusually, wrote: 'That's a good question' and reeled off a long list of things found annoying. Candidates vented their feelings about everything from government issues to people who fiddle with their hair. Several were annoyed at having to resit English, and a very amusing response came from a candidate who had been late for the summer examination because on his 60-kilometre drive to school by motorbike taxi he had been stuck behind a pig lorry.

1203 5H

There were significantly fewer candidates entered for the Higher than for the Foundation Tier. Again, all questions were approached positively and showed that candidates had understood the material provided for Question 1, and the demands of this and the other questions.

Section A

Question 1

The passage was within the range of the candidates and provided many features for comment and analysis. Design features, particularly layout, were well explored, whereas comment on use of language was typically weaker. Better answers were evaluative and analytical in approach - some candidates were confident enough to be critical of the content of the material. Many candidates, however, still depended on a descriptive approach.

Section B

Question 2

More effective answers were adopted and sustained a format and tone, which was appropriate to the context. Accuracy remained at a modest level, with few exceptions.

Question 3

Overall candidates showed a sound grasp of letter style and structure. Most answers explained the situations chosen in considerable detail, but there was limited use of persuasive devices.

Section C

Question 4

This produced some interesting answers, the more successful demonstrating a sound grasp of what a review entailed; these typically supported ideas by both personal anecdote and objective data (e.g. quoting "surveys"). Many concentrated on the stimulus to membership provided by sporting events.

Question 5

Some strong personal opinions were expressed in answer to this question. Answers used the organisation suggested by the wording of the question to fair effect. The command of an appropriately analytical approach and style was reasonable. Again, personal anecdote was used to support points.

Statistics for GCSE English 1203

Option 1: Paper 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	100	59	47	35	24	13

Option 2: Paper 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary Mark	100	93	73	63	54	44	39

Notes

Boundary Mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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