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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language (4EA1) Paper 02R

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This report will provide exemplification of candidates' work, together with tips and comments, for Paper 2R of the International GCSE Specification A in English Language. This was the first examination of the new 'A' specification in IGCSE English Language 9-1. The paper consists of three components: Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing - 60% (examination); Unit 2: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing - 40% (this examination) OR Unit 3: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing - 40% (non-examination assessment). Candidates may also be entered for the optional Spoken Language Endorsement (non-examination assessment). Unit 2 for Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing is assessed through an examination lasting one hour and thirty minutes. The total number of marks available is 60. The reading and writing sections on this paper are loosely linked by the theme of the text from the Anthology which appears on the examination paper.

This focus of this component is:

Section A – Poetry and Prose Texts: study and analyse selections from a range of fictional poetry and prose texts.

Candidates should study the poetry and prose provided in Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology* in preparation for responding to a given extract in the examination.

The specification identifies that candidates:

'should be able to read substantial pieces of writing (extended texts) that make significant demands on them in terms of content, structure and the quality of language. Throughout the qualification, students should develop the skills of inference and analysis.'

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section A, and there will be one essay question on a poetry or prose text from Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology*, which will be made available in a booklet in the examination if it is a longer extract or will be in the Question Paper in the case of a poem.

Candidates will answer the question in this section and 30 marks are available. There are three bullet points to prompt the response and the third bullet always asks candidates to consider language and structure.

Section B – Imaginative Writing: explore and develop imaginative writing skills.

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section B. There are three writing tasks, to some extent linked by theme to the reading extract. Candidates pick one question to respond to and the response is worth 30 marks. The format of the tasks remains the same for each series – Question 1 follows the format 'Write about a time when you, or someone you know...', Question 2 follows the format 'Write a story with the title...' and Question 3 offers two images as a prompt for a response which is always 'Write a story that begins...' or 'Write a story that ends...'.

The Assessment Objectives for this paper are:

Section A: Reading

AO1:

- read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives

AO2:

- understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects.

Section B: Writing

AO4:

- communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences

AO5:

- write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation.

It was clear that candidates were all able to respond to the text from the Anthology in the examination, although not always clear that they had been fully prepared in their understanding of ideas and information across the whole story.

While candidates demonstrated they were able to read a substantial piece of writing, this should have only been a reminder of a story they have studied in detail and have seen before. Throughout the qualification, overall candidates had been prepared well and all had, at different levels, developed the skills required to answer the questions.

It was also clear that candidates used what they had studied in their reading to feed into their imaginative writing. As the specification identifies, the main aims for our candidates in this paper are:

- read critically and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly, punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary alongside knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology, and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.

Candidates had, pleasingly, been given the opportunity to practise their writing techniques and planning and proofreading skills.

The responses of candidates had some positive features. Examiners were impressed by:

- evidence that many candidates had understood the content of and ideas in the text
- completion of the questions in the paper and coverage of all of the assessment objectives
- the range of vocabulary for AO5
- writing that showed creative ideas and suitable tone, style and register for audience and purpose.

Less successful responses:

- demonstrated a lack of awareness of the ideas in the text across the full text
- failed to reference the question, with candidates simply writing all they knew about the story
- had an insecure grasp of language and structure with a lack of understanding of how language and structure were used, feature-spotting or confusion of terms
- had limited comment on language and structure and relied heavily on description of ideas or events for Question 1
- failed to support points using appropriate textual evidence
- lacked organisation of writing
- lacked accurate spelling and secure control of punctuation and grammar.

It was clear that candidates had been able to understand the ideas in at least the first part of the text, and their own writing was often enthusiastic and had a clear sense of purpose and audience in the voice and ideas used.

Question 1

AO1

The first two bullet points in the mark scheme relate to AO1 - read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives. The level of understanding of the text from the Anthology is assessed in the first bullet point, and the selection and interpretation of information, ideas and perspectives in the text in the second bullet point.

At the very basic level candidates tended to either re-tell events of *The Necklace* or misunderstand details of it. They were able to show some understanding of some parts of the text, but the understanding was uneven across the content and often not related to the question being asked, for example Madame Loisel and her dissatisfaction with her situation in life. There was often limited selection and interpretation of information and ideas, and candidates at the lower level often did not understand the significance of the ending of the story to the question being asked.

Candidates at the Grade 4 borderline were at least able to identify some of the key ideas in the text, although at this borderline grade there was often an imbalance where the focus was on identifying basic/valid ideas and information from the beginning of the story rather than being appropriate, apt or persuasive for the higher levels. For example, candidates at this borderline grade often had not considered the full text and considered the

ending. Better answers provided a more balanced approach, by beginning with a clear focus on the idea of money and possessions and using that focus to explore the importance of money and possessions, including reference to the three characters in their assessment. The answers recognised the clear distinction in the lives of the Loiseles, before and after the loss of the necklace, with many pointing out the 'moral' of the short story as a result of this understanding, even through quite simple comment such as 'look to people who are poorer than you', 'Never look to someone on top of you, always look to people beneath you', and 'money changes other peoples' perspective of you'.

Candidates at borderline Grade 7 were more direct in approach, as they were able to select the relevant ideas from the story in a detailed but succinct manner. Candidates at this borderline at least covered the full text of the story, and offered detailed comment including '[the writer] presents *The Necklace* as a story of materialism and the whole notion of wanting to become wealthy and importance of money, when it is all just an appearance' and referencing the short-lived happiness that money/material possessions can give. One candidate commented 'The story shows money causes more problems as opposed to the mentality society holds that money can solve anyone's problems.'

AO2

The third bullet point in the mark scheme relates to AO2 - understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. There needs to be understanding of the language and structure used in the text, and the level of skill is also a discriminator. *Explain* is a mid-level skill, *comment* a lower level skill and *explore/analyse* higher-level skills, which gives candidates opportunities to achieve across the range.

At the lowest levels candidates often made reference to language and structure as a brief add-on at the end of the answer. Candidates here often identified and named devices, but did not demonstrate the skill or understanding to discuss their use. At this level responses were characterised by writing without any explanations – candidates here were good at finding both language and structure features, but not as confident at explaining them. The responses were much more at a descriptive level, with limited and underdeveloped evidence.

Candidates at the Grade 4 borderline were at least commenting on both language and structure. At this borderline grade candidates were commenting on and explaining language and structure, with appropriate and relevant references. Candidates at Grade 4 border were able to pick out features in the text, but often there was little developed explanation of the effect of these features. The majority at the borderline grade were able to comment clearly on vocabulary and images, short sentences and exclamations. Some explanations at this borderline grade were non-specific: 'The writer uses language and structure to engage the reader.'

Candidates at the Grade 7 borderline were commenting on both language and structure consistently, confidently and succinctly. At this borderline grade candidates were exploring and analysing language and structure, with

detailed and discriminating references. The majority at the borderline grade were able to explore less obvious features such as tone and symbolism alongside the features of borderline Grade 4. The examples of language and structure used at this borderline grade were much more considered and selected than at borderline Grade 4, showing a perceptive understanding of how this element reflected the importance of money and possessions. For example, one candidate commented that M. Loisel being 'intoxicated' with her success 'introduced an element of danger through the poisonous connotations of 'intoxicated'".

The final bullet point in the mark scheme relates to selection and use of references from the text which has been studied for both AO1 and AO2. This is a very useful discriminator in this question. As previously mentioned, candidates were sometimes unable to consider key parts of the story, where candidates perhaps missed key elements that would have demonstrated apt, persuasive selection of information and ideas. Not all candidates moved beyond the opening sections of the story.

Writing

At the lowest grade boundary candidates tended to offer a basic response. They always had straightforward use of tone, style and register, with audience and purpose not always clear. At this level candidates tended to express but not always connect ideas and information, with limited use of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing.

At the Grade 4 borderline candidates tended to at least have straightforward and at best appropriate use of tone, style and register, selecting material and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose. At this borderline grade candidates tended to connect, but not always develop, ideas and information, with some structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. There was a tendency in the majority of responses marked at the Grade 4 borderline to set out a stronger description in the start of the story and then focus more on plot towards the end where planning had let the candidates down. At this level the use of vocabulary and syntax tended to be appropriate but repetitive and at times limited to vague simile/metaphor, use of short sentences, questions and exclamations for effect. The level of AO5 at this borderline was appropriate but overall formulaic, where it appeared that candidates had learned specific adjectives or similes to use in their writing and felt the need to 'shoe-horn' them in at times. Students frequently wrote stories which were just over a page, quickly rushing to complete the response without any real thought as to structure or reveal of information.

In the best responses candidates tended to at least have successful and at best touches of subtle use of tone, style and register, managing ideas and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose. At this borderline level candidates tended to manage, but not always manipulate, ideas and information, with a range of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. Responses at this level had some creative ideas, humour and withholding information to the end as a technique. The Grade 7 boundary tended to have some impressive vocabulary and were lengthy, sustained pieces.

The assessment objectives for these tasks effectively discriminated the quality of responses. Advice to centres would be to encourage candidates to avoid thinking they need to write a whole novel or even short story in the time available – they need to have a clear organisation and direction in mind, and to perhaps not ‘over-season’ the pieces with vocabulary and syntax.

The main areas that discriminated these responses were:

- whether candidates could meet both parts of the first part of bullet one in the mark scheme for AO5 – for example they often expressed ideas to achieve in Level 2, but these ideas lacked the order for the second part of that bullet. In Level 3, they may have connected ideas but not developed them.
- the success of tone, style and register in AO4.
- the spelling of basic vocabulary in AO5.
- the accuracy of punctuation and use of varied punctuation in AO5.
- the use of a range of sentence structures for AO5.

Sentence structure was clearly an area centres had focussed on: varying the way sentences begin; more use of subordinate clauses to begin complex sentences; effective use of one-word sentences and one-sentence paragraphs to demonstrate conscious crafting. Some candidates attempted to use ambitious vocabulary while some seemed to steer away from ambitious vocabulary in order to maintain accuracy. A key message to centres is to focus on crafting and organisation whatever the nature of the task. This was a common weakness running through all but the very best answers. The more ‘pedestrian’ answers showed a lack of organisation and often demonstrated a lack of planning and direction. Be ambitious in the structure, vocabulary and range of ideas and try to be creative and original.

In terms of register it was clear that the majority of the candidates knew how to write an imaginative piece, however there were some that produced responses that were more like an essay. Examiners noted that candidates need to manage their time better, as even responses that started off strong appeared unfinished or rushed at the end.

Some comments from examiners include:

- ‘Material could be quite effective in terms of content, but was riddled with errors of all types.’
- ‘Some candidates had learnt an opening paragraph/s and included them whatever.’
- ‘Many of the answers were extremely long, but showed very little control. Less would perhaps have been better in these instances. Such answers had no clear sense of direction and switched from one idea to another without any sense of linking the material to the question.’
- ‘There were often extremely unconvincing events such as “saw people flying everywhere-something didn’t look right”, as well as endings such as....it was all a dream/...and they all lived happily ever after.’

- 'I was surprised by the bad language that was used, seemingly as a matter of course and without any apparent recognition of suitable vocabulary.'

Question 2: Write about a time when you, or someone you know, felt disappointed.

Examiners noted a wide range of responses being offered including examination results and some on sporting achievements. Others tried for a more philosophical approach, for example 'A disappointment should be welcome as long as you don't let it swallow you in negative feelings' and 'Disappointment can be seen as a negative driving force; it can be switched into a positive one, like changing the gears in a car.' Family disappointments were explored, some situations being worse than others.

Question 3: Write a story with the title 'Lost'.

This question discriminated well, producing quite a variety of answers from the fairly mundane, being lost while camping/in a forest/in an unknown area/apart from friends/finally found, to the more thoughtful and perceptive, such as the girl who did not choose her path in life and was therefore lost, 'trapped in a false freedom.' Some writing which began as lost (for example in the forest), became more subtle as the story progressed, for example:

'What appeared as a paradise in the morning transformed into a treacherous battlefield at night. He had lost his humanity to escape the terrors of the forest.'

Some quite simple ideas worked effectively such as being lost in a new school and a strange city. Other more complex starting points were equally successful such as lost identity as a successful pianist or being lost 'in the preposterous concept humanity calls civilisation'. One candidate explored being lost through the idea of cerebral palsy, 'having an endless library of knowledge in my head, but no exit door.' Another began with 'I will forever be lost in the concept of time.' Several answers were based on the idea of being lost from one's family, for various reasons.

Question 4: Look at the images provided. Write a story that ends 'He heard the door slam'.

Examiners commented on their enjoyment of many of the answers to this question, some of which conveyed the threat contained in the question stem extremely effectively. Both images were used, with the first one the more popular choice. One examiner wrote:

'Once immured, candidates produced some beautiful descriptive sections such as 'A glimmering candle creating whimsical shadows dancing across the bland wall...the little taps resonating off the walls like the patter of raindrops...'

Summary

Based on their performance on the paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure you have studied the poetry and prose texts in the Anthology fully and use the examination time to remind yourself of the text, not re-read it.
- If the poetry or prose text is a longer text consider what the key points are linked to the question you are being asked.
- Make you are covering the whole story from beginning to end in order to meet AO1 in the higher levels.
- Read the question carefully and make sure you are answering this question, not telling the examiner what you know about the story or poem you have studied. The selection needs to be relevant to the question you are being asked, in this case the importance of money and possessions.
- For AO2 (language and structure), make sure you are offering ideas about how language and structure are used. Many of you were able to give examples, but sometimes you did not offer a comment about the example was used.
- For AO2 try to cover points on both language and structure, commenting on the different techniques that have been used by the writer and how they link to the overall topic of the question, in this case the importance of money and possessions
- When you are writing, always think about your reader, what information and ideas you want to develop and how you want the reader to react at different parts of your writing; then choose the best words, phrases or techniques available to you to achieve those effects.
- Think carefully about how you will begin to write so that it is engaging for your reader from the very start.
- As you begin to write, know where you will end. This will help you to write in a manner that is cohesive and coherent for your reader.
- Take care throughout with accuracy: spelling, punctuation and grammar
- In writing, focus on crafting and organisation whatever the nature of the task.
- Be ambitious in your structure, vocabulary and range of ideas and try to be creative and original.
- For Question 4 check if you are asked to start or end your story with a phrase.
- Think about your audience and avoid using inappropriate language, such as swearing, in your writing.
- Use the number of marks available for each question as an indication of how long you should spend answering each question.

