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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language (4EA1) Paper 02

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This report will provide exemplification of candidates' work, together with tips and comments, for Paper 2 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 references to context and links to feminism in response to the reading text
- 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 Story of an Hour* 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. There was often limited selection and interpretation of information and ideas, and candidates at the lower level often did not understand the relationship between the sisters.

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 picked upon individual phrases or single actions of Mrs. Mallard, using them to make (usually incorrect) moral judgements – she did not love her husband all the time and was therefore a ‘bad’ person, she was inconsistent in her emotions and therefore had psychological problems, she was pleased that her husband had died, for example.

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 understood the implications of Mr. Mallard’s return, although not perhaps with the awareness of impact that Grade 8 or 9 candidates would have.

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 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 – there were many references to pathetic fallacy for example – 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, and often were linked confidently to context such as feminism. This borderline grade allowed for

candidates who related language, structure and meaning in a concise and constructive manner.

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. It was clear that not all candidates understood the reasons for Mrs Mallard's death. The relationship between Mrs Mallard and her sister was often a good discriminator for this question.

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. Many of the responses at this level used the image of the traffic jam to just replay a traffic jam, although this is acceptable and gave them a useful starting point.

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:

- ‘Some wonderful creative pieces, lots of humour, lots of withholding information until the end.’
- ‘Lots of amazing vocabulary and lots of lengthy sustained pieces.’
- ‘Still too many stories ending on a cliff-hanger (allegedly) but it was obvious that there was nowhere else to go.’
- ‘I was surprised, not so pleasantly, at the amount of inappropriate language used, including swearing.’
- ‘There were some humorous examples of tales of the unexpected along with a couple of darker ones. This enabled students to be creative in their writing.’
- ‘Responses to the images were mostly predictable responses which lacked creativity.’

Question 2: Write about a time when you, or someone you know, enjoyed success.

Examiners noted a wide range of responses being offered including the success from sporting or academic ability and also some surrounding family. The question successfully allowed candidates to draw from a range of personal experiences. In the most successful responses, candidates had sophisticated use of tone and narrative. The use of sentence variety along with taking the reader on the 'journey' with the writer created much engagement, for example:

'some with a sci-fi edge and war themes which worked really well as did the one where five boys won a gaming competition – just such a variety.'

Question 3: Write a story with the title 'A Surprise Visitor'.

This question discriminated well with a variety of thoughtful, subtle and creative ideas, such as surprise visitors that were illness or death. One examiner noted:

'The title for the story garnered a wide range of responses, with some obviously based on film or video game narratives. The 'haunted house' storyline was popular too as was a *Psycho*-type encounter.'

Some quite simple ideas worked effectively such as a family member being a surprise visitor. Other more complex starting points were equally successful such as a surprise visitor that was a concept rather than a person.

Question 4: Look at the images provided. Write a story that begins 'I did not have time for this'.

Examiners felt that this question elicited the weakest responses with some very obvious narratives about the image(s), especially the traffic jam, which was the most popular image. Many stories in this question ended unhappily with crashes, death or loss of jobs, and examiners did note that audience and purpose were clear throughout.

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 character of Mrs. Mallard.
- 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 character of Mrs. Mallard.
- 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.
- 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.

