

GCSE



Chief Examiner's Report English Language

Summer Series 2018



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of CCEA's General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in English Language for this series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Chief Examiner's Report

Assessment Unit 1 Writing for Purpose and Audience and Reading to Access Non-fiction and Media Texts

The Year 11 candidature for the first unit of the Revised Specification seemed to handle the challenges of this question paper quite successfully. There was much evidence of effective teaching and preparation. It was also clear that most candidates had been familiarised with the Specimen Assessment Materials (SAMs) and were well prepared for the new format of the examination.

Again, most candidates completed the question paper, demonstrating their ability to manage their time and cope with the challenge of the increased number of tasks. Where timing was an issue, it was usually down to spending too much time on Section A.

The writing task facilitated a range of varied and engaging responses. The topical issue of body image proved accessible to candidates of differing abilities. The reading materials in Section B were also facilitative, pleasingly, for the entire ability range.

Overall, examiners welcomed the removal of the tiered element and the introduction of the segmented approach to Tasks 3 and 5. The following remarks were typical of the feedback received:

"I definitely felt that candidates were not disadvantaged by the removal of the tiering system as the revised mark scheme accommodated candidates of different abilities to achieve."

"First impressions...I really liked the new structured format for Tasks 3 and 5 which I feel helped to encourage candidates to be more discerning, focused and specific in their answers."

Quite a few examiners also commented on how user friendly the question paper was for the candidates, in particular the layout and use of emboldened instructions that helped them navigate their way through the tasks. One examiner took the time to acknowledge the "serious effort by the Senior Examining Team to make the paper as accessible as possible. It was obvious that a good deal of thought had gone into this."

Section A: Writing for Purpose and Audience

Task 1

Write a speech for your classmates persuading them to agree with your views on the following issue: "Young people today are too worried about their body image."

Task 1 was approached positively by almost all candidates. The format of a speech to their own classmates produced many engaging responses that were frequently very persuasive and closely aligned to purpose. Quite a few candidates focused on the issues of weight for girls and muscles for boys with many using personal experiences/anecdotes to support their arguments. Kim Kardashian was by far the most frequently cited example of a poor role model!

It was evident that much sound teaching had taken place as many candidates were clearly skilled at writing stimulating introductions and conclusions; dealing with counter-arguments in their speeches and able to use sarcasm to great effect! One examiner shared her favourite moments from her marking: "Don't let negativity defeat you"/"This is the age of

the screenagers”/“Body image has hi-jacked society” and the appropriate use of the word “pusillanimous”.

The candidature appeared comfortable with the issue of body image – perhaps because it has been discussed within the wider curriculum – and there was clear evidence of knowledge in relation to eating disorders, for example. Though it was clear that some candidates had negative experiences related to this topic, this mostly seemed to help these candidates convey their feelings in a meaningful and reflective way.

There was, however, a very small number of candidates who ignored the specified topic preferring to write about something more interesting to them. Some candidates disregarded the persuasive element of the task which was made clear in the directive, while others included unconvincing “expert opinion” and/or “research”.

One examiner reported: “responses were confident and well structured. I felt that many candidates focused clearly on the purpose of persuading their audience to share their views, offering responses that were polemical, logical and purposeful.”

Spelling, punctuation and grammar was generally good, though the following weaknesses in some responses were noted in examiners’ reports:

- the “interchangeable” use of commas and full stops;
- a lack of understanding of possessive apostrophes and the use of semi colons;
- the overuse of ellipsis (apparently now quite prevalent);
- the recurrent problems with the spelling of homophones;
- grammatical inaccuracies particularly tense inconsistency, subject-verb agreement and the correct choice of prepositions; and
- inappropriately joined words e.g. “everyday”; “alot”; “eachother”, “infront” “incase”.

Section B: Reading to Access Non-Fiction and Media Texts

Task 2

Read the text below where the writer describes his attempt to reach the top of the volcano. Explain how he has presented this in a way that engages his readers.

The stimulus for Task 2 clearly engaged most candidates and the rich language provided adequate opportunity for candidates to select relevant material and identify the writer’s intentions. Most used a ‘P.E.E.-type’ structure to respond to the task and many were able to confidently identify and analyse the devices they spotted within the piece. The strongest candidates also managed to effectively discuss the use of sentence structure. Overall, candidates understood the requirements of the task. There were many responses from candidates who were able to interpret, explain and evaluate a range of relevant examples in a focused manner. There were some very detailed and perceptive responses.

The following weaknesses were identified and are well worth making future candidates aware of:

- including learned phrases by way of explanation instead of demonstrating understanding of the piece in a specific way;
- the use of general and straightforward comments along the lines of “this engages the reader to read on” and “this draws the reader in” dominated quite a few responses – perhaps more noticeable in this series as only Year 11 candidates were entered;
- some candidates picked out factual details such “the 5,466ft volcano” which had exploded “in the winter of 1821”, often without further explanation, rather than attempting to comment on strong examples from the text such as: “straining to hear

the volcano whisper its menace” and “the heavy, sulphurous stench of the beast” which were richer in potential. Judicious choosing of textual examples will be of paramount importance as time is limited to 15 minutes;

- there was some tendency to ‘feature spot’ without even attempting to comment on how the writer tried to engage the reader.

Task 3

Read the text below where the writer is thinking about his increased respect for the power of nature.

In your own words, write down two reasons for this increased respect: select one reason from each paragraph. Present two pieces of supporting evidence for each reason.

The stimulus for Task 3 also enabled the majority of candidates to identify two clear reasons for the writer’s increased respect with a small number getting confused and drawing on the material for Task 2 instead. Even in cases where candidates found it difficult to put the reason into their own words, most were then able to correctly identify two pieces of supporting evidence.

Although great care was taken to ensure the instructions for candidates to take one reason from each paragraph were clear and unambiguous, some candidates got muddled and, for example, chose all the evidence from one paragraph or failed to provide two pieces of evidence in each case. This task also seemed to confuse a small number of higher ability candidates who appeared to overthink and overanalyse what was required and went on to evaluate the effectiveness of the supporting evidence.

In a very small number of papers this task was not attempted.

Task 4

Read the text and explain how language has been used to develop a sense that this book would be interesting and exciting to read. Present supporting evidence.

The text for this task proved accessible as the blurb was engaging with plenty of linguistic devices to potentially plunder. Overall, candidates had no difficulty understanding the requirement to locate and analyse a range of examples explaining how the writer had developed a sense that the book would be exciting to read. In general, candidates employed the same approach as for Task 2 and tended to gain similar marks.

There was some misunderstanding of terms such as “the mouth of their Afghan cave” and “She is more like a friend than a dog” noted as candidates strove to identify every linguistic technique of which they were aware.

The same weaknesses – for example, ‘feature spotting’ – were identified as for Task 2.

Task 5

Select two presentational features used in this cover to make this book appealing to the reader. Explain the intended effect of these two presentational devices on the reader.

This was intended to be an accessible task and, in the main, candidates followed instructions and had successful outcomes. I have listed the main teething problems below but am confident that these will easily be resolved as teachers become familiar with the specific requirements of this task:

- some candidates were very general when identifying a presentational device (opting only for the umbrella terms of “colour” or “images” for example). These generic terms could not be credited but this misunderstanding is highly unlikely to happen again as candidates must respond to the given media text;

- although some offered non-specific choices of presentational features, they did go on to achieve well in their explanations. For others, this was not the case as they offered a more overall analysis of the colours or images in the text rather than focusing on one specific colour or image in 5b and 5d. Examiners were instructed to credit the best analysis offered of any colour/image, for example, as appropriate;
- in some cases, having identified a feature, the candidate inexplicably went on to explain something unrelated;
- a few candidates identified abstract, non-presentational features such as “hope” or “war”; and
- the tendency for some to offer inappropriate colour symbolism.

I’ll leave you with an encouraging remark from one of the examiners about the overall standard of the papers she marked: “I found the high standard of many of the candidates’ responses quite remarkable bearing in mind they are only Year 11!”

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