

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE English Language (6EN02)
The Writing Process

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General Overview

In the great majority of cases centres submitted work which was fully in line with the requirements of the specification. It was evident that centres have continued to prepare and support candidates well. The detailed annotation of work provided by almost all centres demonstrated that assessment was being carried out with careful consideration of the assessment objectives. The annotation made it easy to see the process that had been followed when awarding marks. In the majority of cases the centre's assessment was accurate.

The choice of tasks was fairly evenly distributed this year across all four tasks. The samples of some centres included examples of all four tasks and it was evident that candidates had been given the opportunity to attempt the full range of forms of writing. However, in other centres, all candidates in the centre submitted the same two tasks. While it is recognised that there are considerable pressures of time on students in the AS year, moderators took the view that if centres restrict their teaching to two tasks, this may limit the opportunities for candidates to explore other forms of writing and perhaps develop a wider range of skills.

Last year's report mentioned the A04 requirement to 'demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts' and commented that some combinations of tasks, if the writing was not clearly differentiated, could lead to a narrowing of this range. This was particularly true where candidates submitted a file with a Narrative piece and a Dramatic Monologue. However, this year, where candidates did choose this combination, in the most cases, they differentiated clearly between the two genres by, for example, using non-linear narrative strategies or experimenting with different points of view in the Narrative and using stage directions and dramatic effects in the Monologue.

The majority of the work submitted this year complied with the required word length of 2000 to 2500 words for the tasks and 500 for each commentary.

Task 1: Texts for a reading audience.

The Journalism Interview

This task continues to generate work of high quality. Candidates chose a wide variety of people to interview. Subjects included family members, friends, teachers, local celebrities, business men and politicians. What was particularly heartening about the way this task was carried out was that candidates were often surprised and sometimes obviously moved by what they found out in the course of the interviews. Here is what one candidate wrote after interviewing her grandmother:

In only one short interview I had found out more about the heritage of the place in which I live than I had done in my entire life.

The key to success in this task remains the ability to use a variety of forms to shape the spoken content of the interview into effective journalism and the ability to present the interviewer's perspective on the interviewee and entertain, inform and/or persuade the audience. In the following extract the candidate is using physical description of the interviewee and his surroundings to create a perspective and a context for the interview which follows.

Journalism Interview: Exemplar 1

He speaks seamlessly about the past as though he only retired yesterday, the only indication of his age being the occasional hesitation as he recalls names. Well, that and perhaps his appearance: he is wearing a checked shirt, a jumper, some neatly pressed corduroys and has a pair of glasses perched artfully atop his thinning head of hair. We are sitting on a large leather sofa in the rather grand living room of his three bedroom home in Henfield. The shelves are arranged with a string of old knick-knacks, from porcelain figurines to antique collectables. He points out the hat collecting dust on the dresser and informs me it was from the Captain Birdseye campaign he shot in Barbados. The wooden table beside us has on it a stack of books, including a copy of 'Lost English', alongside a specs case and a coffee mug. On a table in the corner lie a few copies of his own book.

Later he uses description of the person's actions to suggest an interpretation of what he may be thinking and feeling;

Occasionally he will pause to take a sip from his coffee and it's clear from his wistful expression that reflecting on the past is as poignant for him as it is stimulating.

Moderator's Comment

The angle that the candidate is taking is that the subject of his interview is getting on now but has had a remarkable and successful career as a writer and film maker. The description here creates a vivid impression of the elderly but still alert man in his comfortable clothes and comfortable home surrounded by remnants of his previous career. He has created the context for what follows in which the subject looks back at key moments in his career. The effect is achieved through the carefully observed detail which 'shows' rather than 'tells' us what the man is like. This is a Band 5 response.

One of the assessment objective descriptors for AO4, Band 5 is that a 'perceptive choice of style and structure achieves complex purposes (including persuasion and entertainment) for stated audiences.' In the following extract the candidate includes a considerable amount of background information, but makes it clear how it will be relevant to the context of the interview.

Journalism Interview: Exemplar 2

Article to be placed in Jamie Oliver's magazine entitled 'Jamie'
The astounding reality is that the youth of today are 35% more likely to be at serious risk of developing potentially devastating conditions such as Type Two Diabetes and Coronary Heart Disease than previous generations. Why? It's simple. The appalling lack of balanced, nutritious food consumed has reached an all time low, with recent surveys suggesting that the majority of young people are opting for more finance-friendly, quick-fix snacks. I met with mother of three M____P_____, 52, to discuss the benefits of wholesome foods and why standards have dropped so dramatically in just two generations.

Moderator's Comment

It is clear here that the interview has a purpose beyond just collecting biographical facts. Rather, the candidate is seeking to address a specific issue in the interview that of the inadequacy of teenager's diets. Her interviewee has considerable experience in this area and strong views on the issue. The candidate has also thought carefully about the audience for the piece and has identified this as the readership of 'Jamie'. An audience obviously interested in food related issues. The piece is informative, even in the first paragraph, and it continues to add relevant facts and statistics throughout. It also has a persuasive aspect as the interviewer clearly shares the interviewee's views on the need to improve the diets of teenagers and the questions that are asked are framed to allow the interviewee to suggest ways this might be done.

Lastly, in terms of purpose, as a magazine article there is also an obvious need to entertain the reader by providing interesting and useful information in an accessible way. It is evident that this candidate meets the Band 5 AO4 criteria achieving complex purposes for a stated audience by perceptive choices of style and structure. Furthermore the decision to base the interview on a specific issue gives the whole piece a sense of direction and a level of coherence it might not otherwise have had.

Later on in the piece the candidate also demonstrates the skill of weaving together different ways of representing the spoken word.

A widespread justification for eating fast, ready-made foods is that cost factors present concern, particularly during these arduous economic times resulting from the recent recession. "Obviously people are always cooking on a budget," Margie acknowledges, nodding. However, she went on to express the view that anyone with enough motivation can learn to save money regularly for decent, wholesome foods by simple cutting back on minor 'luxuries' such as sugary snacks.

Narrative Writing

The majority of candidates who did this task this year followed the requirements in the specification and based their narrative on an oral narrative. Some candidates included an original transcript of the narrative in their file and while there is no requirement to do this it was often fascinating to see how candidates had adapted and transformed the original. The best narrative writing this year took risks with how the story was told and experimented with form.

The example that follows arose from an anecdote told by the candidate's father about an incident when, as a child, he had accidentally been struck by a brick thrown by one of his friends. The candidate changes the original outcome of the sequence of events so that the result is the death of the child hit by the brick. The candidate tells the story from the point of view of a child psychiatrist, who is reviewing the taped interview with the child who threw the brick in order to write a report. The opening to the narrative is terse and gripping while giving the reader key information,

He's ok now though, isn't he?

Stop. Rewind. The mechanical murmur of the cassette player halted abruptly ...

After this we get the psychiatrist's narrative interspersed with snatches of the child speaking on the tape. An extract follows (the child's speech on the tape is given in bold):

Narrative Writing: Exemplar 1

I scanned the room for something to distract me while I waited for the tape; the immaculate sheet of paper I was supposed to be writing the report on just stared up at me in a smug sort of way, the Styroform cup of overly-milky, lukewarm tea, the second hand on the clock that appeared to be moving at a far slower rate than it should. Shadows pursued light across the room, conquering it with darkness. To be honest, I was pleased they

told me to do it like this – if I had to watch it, I would have broken down in tears – if the voice retained a faceless anonymity it would be easier. A heavy clunk warned me that the voice was ready once more and forced me to listen...

We were just playing down by the canal, like what we always do. There's always really cool stuff to play with down there like tyres and shopping trolleys and boxes and other stuff like that.

Anyone in a ten mile radius could have pinpointed the exact location. It was more like a dump than anything else. Along the bank of the canal between two bridges, hidden from view by a few abandoned warehouses is a stretch of unclaimed land.

Moderator's comment

At this point in the story the reader has no idea what has happened. As the sequence of events by the canal gradually unfold through the short extracts of the child speaking we are led to see them through the eyes of the psychiatrist, who is sympathetic to the child speaking, but shocked and horrified by the story he is telling. The narrative technique here is highly sophisticated, but there is nothing artificial about it. It feels completely natural. The sophisticated adult voice of the psychiatrist contrasting with the simpler child's language adds poignancy to the story. The piece shows how varying points of view can be effective as a narrative strategy, but only when as here the dual narrative really improves the story. There is no point in simply telling the same story from different viewpoints. Here the dual narrative in a sense *is* the story. This is a Band 5 response; the ending is equally effective;

I presented the once immaculate sheet to the brutish man who asked, "What's the verdict then? Kid a psycho or what? He don't half look it, I can tell you that." I turned from him and looked through the office window at the boy with the shadowy face whose sweet voice still echoed in my head.

Moderator's Tips

The key here is to be bold. The best narratives did something unexpected with the way the story was told. Some altered the viewpoint from the original or included more than one narrator as above. Others experimented with different ways of sequencing the events or different styles and genres. Starting with the original narrative as raw material there are unlimited ways of transforming it into a piece that will entertain a reading audience.

Task 2: Texts for a listening audience

Scripted Presentation

More candidates are doing this task than in the past and in general it has been done very well. There are fewer 'essays type' pieces which fail to acknowledge the needs of a listening audience. Candidates understand that they need to build a rapport with the audience and most candidates recognise that it can be helpful to include visual aids.

Able candidates were able to present often complex subject matter to an audience (usually of their peers) in a way that was accessible and engaging. This candidate is explaining aspects of child language acquisition to a year 12 class.

Scripted presentation: Exemplar 1

Imagine that you were faced with the following challenge. You just discover the structure of a system that contains tens of thousands of components, all created from a small set of materials. These parts can be assembled into an infinite number of combinations. Somehow you must combine all these different elements together and use it to communicate. Oh, and not to mention that you're a very young child

Human language is almost like a mechanical system. The components are words, the materials are the small set of sounds which they're made and the combinations are the sentences they can be used in. Given the complexity of this system, it seems strange that children could discover its underlying structure and use it to communicate. Yet most children do so with eagerness and ease and all within the first few years of life.

Moderator's comment

This is a Band 5 response. The tone here is calm and authoritative. The speaker is certainly not talking down to the audience and in this case the register is not particularly informal with perhaps the exception of the last sentence of the first paragraph. However, by inviting the audience to look at the acquisition of language from the point of view of a child the candidate engages them in the topic they are exploring. The analogy of language as a mechanical system in the second paragraph helps them to understand the complexity of the processes involved. Where does the candidate go to next? To an actual child, moving skilfully from the general and abstract to the particular.

"I feeded the monkey on zoo." Let me introduce you to Sarah. A typical three year-old ...

'Let me introduce you to...' keeps the audience on board as the candidate goes on to explain the concept of 'virtuous errors' through an examination of Sarah's speech.

As well as being able to structure and presenting material effectively to a listening audience this candidate is on top of the material. The description of language is impressive for a seventeen year old. However, the choice of topic or subject matter can cause problems in this task if the candidate is not comfortable with the subject. It is not possible to do an effective presentation for others if you do not fully understand the concepts involved yourself. Candidates sometimes understand the need to address the needs of a listening audience by using strategies to engage their attention but then struggle with the linguistic content of their presentation.

In the extract that follows the candidate sets out to explain to the audience the concept of prescriptivism. This is the second and third paragraph of the script.

Scripted presentation: Exemplar 2

So, for my first point; what is Prescriptivism? (Slide 3) You may have come across this linguistic term before and know the basic meaning but I'm going to go into more detail. It refers to prescribed language, basically wanting a 'right' version of language. Linguistics attempting to impose rules of correct usage on the users of the language. What those linguistics are saying is other variants for a word aren't correct for instance 'brother' is the correct term and 'bro' or 'bruv' is incorrect. I don't know about you but I think this is a major issue.

(Slide 4) RM Hare says, "The prescriptivism theory suggests that if a certain action is morally right it would be right in every situation and can be proved to be right therefore it is right. Prescriptivism holds the notion of universalisability, within its theory when testing the rightness of a moral statement to discover whether or not it is right in every situation." I know it is confusing but when you break it down it summarises what I have been talking about. This quote basically suggests that the 'right' version of a word is right in every situation.

This candidate has understood the need to create a rapport with the audience and deserves credit for this. The audience is addressed directly, the tone is relaxed and friendly and the example given to illustrate the point in the first

paragraph is appropriate for the audience. In the initial paragraph, not reproduced here, the candidate gives clear indicators as to how the presentation will be structured. However, while it is clear that in this case the candidate does understand the concept of prescriptivism, they are finding it difficult to put it into a form that will be easily accessible to their audience. The candidate then enlists a quotation to help out (it appears not to have been transcribed accurately), but it only adds to the confusion. This extract exhibits features at the upper end of Band 3 for A04.

Moderator's Tips

In the other tasks for this unit the subject matter is generated by the candidate, either through talking to others or through using their own imagination. However, in the scripted presentation the subject matter is extrinsic to the candidate and as it involves linguistic concepts it is vital that the candidate is on top of these. To be successful, candidates need to choose an area of language study with which he or she is completely comfortable.

Dramatic Monologue

This remains a popular option with centres. The strongest candidates were aware of the dramatic nature of the genre and found ways of engaging the attention and interest of a listening audience by thinking about how the narrative might be staged or presented using stage directions and sound and/or lighting effects. As in previous years the weaker responses ignored the needs of a listening audience and wrote monologues which were more like stream of consciousness passages in fiction. In some centres there was a tendency for candidates to produce monologues in which the speaker was conceived of as having a strong regional accent. The candidates then tried to reproduce the accent by spelling the words phonetically. However, this was sometimes difficult for moderators to decipher. As a general rule, if the candidate wishes to convey a character has a strong accent, it is preferable to state that at the start in a stage direction and perhaps hint at the more obvious features in one or two places through phonetic spelling. The majority of the text however should stick to conventional orthography to ensure that it can be understood.

Drama Monologue: Exemplar 1

Natural lighting comes up on a 16-year-old, Sarah, who is sitting centre-stage staring vacantly forward, playing with her hair.

A pair of scissors lies next to her and a chair is behind her. A photo frame of her friends smiling is standing on a desk stage right.

Sarah: It's funny, isn't it? How everyone suddenly wants to be your friend when you've done something unusual. (She stops playing with her hair and tilts her head). When you turn a small insignificant object ... (She picks up the scissors and runs them through her fingers). But why does it have to be a problem? (She drops the scissors and stands, raising her voice) It's got nothing to do with you! (Pointing to different audience members on each 'you') Not you, or you, or you! It's my life! (Pause. She sits down on the chair and takes a deep breath, her voice returning to normal.) You think you understand me, don't you? (She walks over to the photo frame) No, I don't want to come out this Friday. What? You think I should get out of my house? Why? So that I can watch you make an idiot out of yourself? No thanks. (She slams the photo frame face down) I'm fine here.

Moderator's Comments

This is a Band 5 response. This candidate is very aware of the dramatic nature of the media. Everything is working together, the spoken word, stage directions, props, lighting. The voice is original and distinctive and dramatic tension is created immediately by the way the speaker challenges the audience. The whole scene is conceived in theatrical terms, the lighting is considered and the speaker's actions convey as much significance as her speech. It is evident that the candidate has envisioned the situation as a performance. One of the things that emerge from the commentary is that the candidates at this centre were given the opportunity to have their monologues actually performed which in this case has clearly had a positive effect. Because the piece is being imagined so vividly as a dramatic piece the candidate has included a lot of direction. It should be stressed that it isn't necessary for candidates to include this much direction. They should, however, show some awareness that they are writing a script intended for performance.

The tendency for some candidates to write monologues to be spoken by celebrities, historical figures and well known fictional characters continued this year. Generally speaking the monologues for fictional characters were more successful than the ones written to be spoken by celebrities. It is hard to come up with an original 'voice' for a speaker whose particular vocal mannerisms are well known.

The following is the final paragraph of a monologue for a historical character which doesn't include any stage directions at all, but nevertheless creates a vivid and distinctive spoken voice.

Dramatic Monologue: Exemplar 2

Here I sit, decaying, tediously blathering with my heart in plain view for all to see, syphilitic and frail, alive as ever but bound for the grave, the product and personification of our times. I thought I would live to be a hundred, but now I know I won't live to see thirty. Here I go ... shuffling away from this world as I leave you this legacy of shame that would have belonged to a shameless man. This is it. This is my epilogue. No protestations of modesty or pleas of absolution. You weren't expecting that, I hope. My name is John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, and I demand that you hate me.

Commentaries

On the whole commentaries were done well this year. The absence of any reference to stimulus texts which was commented on in last year's report was not nearly as prevalent this year as the majority of candidate did make sure that there was some reference to them in at least one of their commentaries. The best commentaries were those in which candidates were able to link linguistic choices in the process of creating texts with genre, purpose and audience. Here are two commentaries where the candidates are successful in doing this. The first is the commentary written by the candidate who wrote the first example of a Journalism Interview, an extract of which given above. The candidate is discussing the same task.

Commentary: Exemplar 1

In order to present him in a positive light, I focused on balancing his successful career ("he dreamt up one of the most successful advertising slogans of all time ...") with his warm and approachable character ("He is sitting slouched on the sofa, beaming as he chats away.") I used several pragmatic techniques to enhance the angle I established, such as free indirect speech ("he admits frankly that he can't actually tell the difference in taste.") The use of the inquit 'admits' followed by the adverb 'frankly' gives the sense of his honesty, reinforcing his good nature. Similarly to the style of the Christopher Ciccone interview, I used a mixed register with Latinate lexis ("acquaintances") to suit my audience, as well as colloquialisms and idioms ("hit the nail on the head") to keep it chatty. I also used noun phrases to give further description to something, for example:

The hat collecting dust on the dresser

The detail in the post- modifying clause suggests it's very old, building on the sentimental value of the hat.

Moderator's Comments

This is a band 5 response. In this brief extract the candidate shows a high level of confidence in using linguistic vocabulary. The exemplification is relevant and appropriate. Linguistic choices are linked to purpose and audience and there is a reference to linguistic choices in a stimulus text (the Christopher Ciccone interview).

The second commentary is by the candidate who wrote the Dramatic Monologue in the first example above.

Commentary: Exemplar 2

I used many stage-directions in my piece so that I can show the actor exactly how I'd like to see it performed. I also thought about lighting and I chose to keep it natural as it reflects a naturalistic Stanislavskian monologue spoken by a normal person; this is important as the pragmatic meaning behind my monologue is that she is just a normal teenager and hers is a common problem. I chose to use props such as scissors and a photo frame as it focuses the audience's attention and enables them to visualise the set clearly. The scissors resemble the thing that she loves and hates and throughout the monologue she is visibly struggling to fight away from them which I showed through the stage direction "(She rests her cheek on her knee, looking down at the scissors. She drags her focus away from them with visible struggle and stands.)" Sarah's mood rises and falls with her temptation to self-harm and by the end of the monologue the blackout symbolises her will, succumbing to the temptation and ceasing to fight as the "blackness engulfs {her}".

Moderator's Comments

This commentary shows the extent to which the candidate was taking account of the issues related to creating a piece for performance. Elsewhere in the commentary the candidate discusses her stimulus texts ('Like Dreaming Backwards' by Kelly Powell) and specific linguistic choices. However, in this part she makes use of her own technical knowledge about dramatic technique and symbolism. Like the author of exemplar 1, this candidate is able to confidently link decisions about form and language with purpose and audience. This is a band 5 response.

Moderator's Tips

There is no template for commentaries. They will vary according to the task. The best ones are able to explain and evaluate the decisions made in the process of creating the text in linguistic terms and relate these decisions to their overall purpose.

Grade Boundaries

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