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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE English Language 6EN02 01

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6EN02: Exploring the Writing Process

Introduction

The majority of centres this year submitted work which was completely in line with the assessment criteria and the specification requirements. Centres seemed far more confident in tackling the tasks for unit two. The overall standard was good. The take up of the four tasks seemed much more evenly distributed with more candidates opting for the scripted presentation than last year. Candidates who took this option often did it very well. Centres did tend to stick to doing just two of the options though, with all candidates doing the same tasks. This was sometimes a problem when the two tasks were the narrative writing and the monologue. The more able candidates had sufficient understanding of genre to clearly differentiate between the two tasks. For example, by using the conventions within the monologue and experimenting with different points of view and varied structures in the narrative writing. Less able candidates found it hard to differentiate the pieces in terms of genre, sometimes producing two first person chronological narratives, which made it much harder to produce effective texts in terms of genre conventions. Candidates at this level who chose two very different tasks, such as interview and monologue or narrative writing and scripted presentation found it easier to meet the criteria for awareness of genre at AO4 and were also better able to meet the requirement to show control over style and structure to suit different purposes and audiences.

Most of the centres had applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently and had provided detailed and focused annotation to support the marks given. Marking was generally secure in top half of the mark range. Centres sometimes appeared to find it harder to allocate marks accurately in the lower mark bands. It also seemed to be the case that some centres found it hard to arrive at an accurate mark for candidates who had worked hard at tasks and commentaries, but whose control of written English was not secure and whose work was characterised by grammatical and lexical inaccuracies. Often work from such candidates was marked too highly at A01 and at A04 ('control over style and structure ...').

Task One

The Journalism Interview

In the case of Task One, the journalism interview continues to produce excellent work from candidates. The majority of candidates showed real engagement in this task. It was clear from their texts and their commentaries that they were aware of the need to represent speech in a variety of different ways, and to present their interviewee from a particular perspective. There were very few of the kind of 'verbatim' interviews that made no attempt to do either of these things.

These two sets of criteria were the key to achieving highly in this task. For both A03 and A04 candidates need firstly to show the ability to represent spoken language in a variety of forms appropriate to genre and secondly to present the interviewer's perspective on the interviewee, again in a way which is appropriate in terms of genre and chosen audience. In effect this meant successful candidates achieved the first objectives by using a mixture of direct and indirect speech, quotations and summary, to convey the content of the interviewee's response. Candidates met the second criteria by presenting telling details about the interviewee such as their appearance, actions, facial expressions and tone of voice and by 'placing' the interviewee in a specific physical setting.

Example One

Sitting at a computer in the comfort of his own home it is clear that David is a dedicated hard-working business man, not returning from his office to relax, but to continue the strenuous day's work.

From the Armani suit to the subtle aroma of expensive after shave, it would seem as though a pretentious attitude would be part of the package, however, he displays a great deal of modesty as he explains his struggle to rebuild his career after being made bankrupt nine years ago.



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Examiner Comments

Here the candidate presents the interviewee in a specific context - sitting at the computer, ready to continue work which supports the authorial view of a 'hard-working business man'. This is then developed with detail about the Armani suit and the expensive aftershave which prepares the reader for the essential background information that follows. Even before the interview has begun we have a clear perspective on the subject.

Example Two

So why would David want to become involved in West Ham football club after having already dealt with so many difficulties in his career? He laughs, "I know that it doesn't seem the obvious thing to do given football clubs' reputations. Everyone jokes, 'How do you become a millionaire? You start off as a billionaire, then buy a football club.'" He goes on to explain how he would have liked to improve how the club is run commercially to prevent the match ticket prices from continually rising.



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Examiner Comments

Here the same candidate inserts the interviewer's question unobtrusively into the article by presenting it as the interviewer's thoughts rather than as a direct question to the interviewee. He then varies how speech is represented by giving the interviewee's actual words so the reader can appreciate the joke and then efficiently summarising the rest of the reply.

Both these extracts show a candidate who is achieving marks in the top band for AO3 and AO4.



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Examiner Tip

Start with a transcription of the interview. Select which parts would be best left in the subjects own words and which could be effectively summarised. Focus on the parts where the subjects language is surprising or entertaining in some way. Then decide on an 'angle' a view of the interviewee, which you want to present to the reader. Make notes on revealing details which could be included that would support this perspective.

Narrative Writing

The narrative writing continues to be a very popular option. Although there were occasional narratives which weren't based on an oral text, this year the vast majority were. There remains the problem of ensuring that the narrative writing is sufficiently differentiated in terms of genre conventions from the dramatic monologue when candidates do both. Generally, in their texts and commentaries, candidates showed they were aware of the assessment objectives at A02 (the need to 'shape' written narratives) and A04 (use of a range of narrative techniques) although, obviously, they were able to realise these objectives with varying degrees of success.

Example Three

This passage comes at the end of the candidate's narrative. The narrator is visiting the site where a tree once stood which she used to visit with her now dead grandfather.

The memory dissolves away and Carrie is alone. Her breath breaks out in ragged gasps as she battles against the racking sobs that seek to seize her. She drags her eyes away from the rings, slips off the stump and stumbles to the park bench. It gives a tired creak as she sits. She stares into space, her tears silent now. "To think that you - you were once a giant, towering over me. And you - we share this space that - that we shared for so long."

For a split second she sees a shadow of the frail, crippled old man, who had sat beside her just three years ago; then the glimmer of a naked tree, with branches that ebb into the sky like dark veins on a pale wrist. But the images are gone in a blink.

Winter is dead, and there are daisies at her feet.



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Examiner Comments

This is a sophisticated piece of narrative writing based on an oral narrative about losing a loved grandparent. There is clear shaping of the narrative here. Immediacy is created by the use of present tense. The narrative is in the third person yet we are given a convincing and powerful representation of the character's inner perspective, 'For a split second she sees ...', 'But the images are gone in a blink.' A variety of sentence forms are used deliberately for effect and the final single sentence is dramatic and moving. There is effective and appropriate use of simile 'the sky like dark veins on a pale wrist' which is in sympathy with the emotional tone of the piece and the central identification of the felled tree with her dead grandfather is well realised.

A short extract from this candidate's commentary will show the way this candidate was able to see a range of sophisticated narrative possibilities in the initial oral text.

Example Four

I based my story upon and extract from my transcript. The references to circles made me think about reoccurring cycles, such as day and night or the seasons. I thought about the way that some stories have a cyclical structure, where the end is similar to the beginning and there is a hint that the same

events will reoccur. I was inspired by how, like an optical illusion, the rings in a tree stump appear to 'tunnel'. This gave me the idea that looking down the rings could take the character to a place in the past. I therefore decided to keep cycles and circles as a constant theme throughout the story

Task Two

Dramatic Monologue

Candidates continued to produce lively and varied examples of monologues. Most candidates were able to successfully replicate features of spoken language to create convincing idiolects for their characters. The most successful were the ones which had looked at models carefully and were therefore aware of conventions of the genre such as the single voice, the use of stage directions to indicate time passing, change of actor's position etc. They were aware of the role of dramatic irony and of the need in a dramatic form to withhold information so that character's situation can be revealed gradually. There were still some who wrote internal monologues or even sketches with more than one speaker but there appeared to be less of these than last year.

Example Five

(sound of bottle opening in the dark. Bright lights come on.)

Newcastle Brown Ale. You're not a Geordie if you don't down a few of these every now and again. Ar, the smell of it.... it doesn't half bring back memories. Me father used to drink this, you see. Great bloke, my dad, dead popular. Everyone knew him- everyone loved him, n'all. He was a real good laugh, witty, you know? Mind you he could really handle his ale. He drank bottles of this stuff like pop.



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Examiner Comments

This is an effective opening to a monologue. The stage directions in brackets show good understanding of the genre recognising that this is a dramatic form intended for a listening and viewing audience. The candidate has thought about how to communicate with the chosen audience and the sound effect of the bottle opening before the light comes on prepares the audience for what follows. The beginning of the monologue quickly establishes a distinctive personal voice which suggests character. The regional dialect/accents is strongly implied, but with minimal deviation from standard English spelling and without recourse to indecipherable written approximations of phonological features.

Example Six

Finally 18, it's a great feeling innit? Best night of ya life ...so I thought. I'm one of the last ones, out of me mates anyway. Held back by me provisional which reads '10/08/92'. I'm not really bothered about the rest. That was me ticket into the nightlife. I can do anything I want now,

well, you know what I mean. I can buy beer, tabs, lotto tickets; I can vote, get a credit card, but most importantly, I can get in any club or pub I want.



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Examiner Comments

Like Example Four this is a successful attempt to create character by using features of spoken English to create the distinctive voice of an eighteen year old boy. It also hints at a particular English regional accent without moving too far from Standard English spelling. It could have been improved with stage directions putting the character in a specific context or indications giving suggestions about timing and tone to the performer. This extract shows evidence of reaching the criteria for band two at AO4, 13 -16 marks.



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Examiner Tip

Think of this task as being primarily a performance, either on a stage or direct to camera. It would be very helpful to actually try the monologue out on an audience. In this genre, significant events in the character's life are likely to have already happened or will happen off stage. A monologue isn't an action movie. Dramatic tension is created by the audience wanting to know more about the character and by the gradual revelation of the character's 'story'. If the character tells their whole story in the first paragraph this tension is lost. Keep the audience interested by withholding important information. Keep them guessing.

The Scripted Presentation

Last year this option was the least popular. However, more candidates attempted the presentation this year and the results were frequently confident and successful. There were some excellent presentations where candidates had clearly thought carefully about how to select and organise subject matter to engage and support a listening audience and where linguistic topics were presented in ways which made them relevant and intriguing to the intended audience. There was less evidence this year of presentations which more closely resembled essays. Candidates who did well at this task found ways to draw their audience in to the subject matter by a variety of techniques and were able to use techniques of reinforcement and visual aids to help listeners understand ambitious language topics.

Example Seven

(Slide One) Wag warn homies? The youths in here will know what that means but for all those born before 1990, good morning/afternoon. I would say the vast majority of you in this classroom are part of a social networking group - whether it is Facebook, MySpace or simply BBMing on your Blackberries, we are all online and socialising on the World Wide Web. (change slide) But here's a question: how many of you take words like 'allow', 'fo'shizzle' and 'wag warn' into the class and into your work? (Change to slide three) Firstly, I will be focusing on how social networking sites affect teenagers in the classroom ,with a few home

truths from teachers themselves. (Change to slide four) I will then go on to the creation of new words on such sites as Facebook and the use of those words. I am interested in whether they depend on how old you are. (Change to slide five) And finally, I will question whether these words get used in places they shouldn't and how they are affecting the younger generation's grades.



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Examiner Comments

The candidate has used striking and unexpected language in opening to immediately engage and intrigue the audience. Two elements in the audience are identified ('youths' and non-youths) and implicitly 'invited' into the presentation. Visual aids are used to support the presentation and effectively to structure the discourse. The outline of the talk is identified and the audience is efficiently 'told what they are going to be told'. This is a candidate who is achieving top band criteria.

Example Eight

The grammar in the cockney speech is also unusual and known as the 'confrontational' question tag: for example, "I said I was going, didn't I?", can be found, plus other tags such as "innit?" in jocular estuary speech. This could indicate a move towards the eventual standardization of colloquial language in the most recent speech found today. These forms of speech can be seen as uneducated and 'common' and are still frowned upon despite their widespread use. The referring to a single occasion 'I never did, no I never' which is a negative form, and a double negative 'I never did no homework' is another example of estuary English.



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Examiner Comments

This candidate is less successful for a number of reasons. Firstly the candidate has picked a topic which is ambitious, but which the candidate has only partially understood. The assessment objectives for this task are, like other unit two tasks, A01, A02 and A04, so the piece is not being marked primarily on linguistic knowledge but on the use of language to achieve specific aims and to address specific audiences. However, as is evident here, it is very difficult to explain ambitious linguistic concepts effectively to a listening audience if a candidate has not fully understood them themselves. Nor is there any sense here of being aware of the needs of a listening audience. The style is closer to an essay than a spoken presentation. This extract shows the candidate performing around the middle of the mark range.



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Examiner Tip

Choose an area of language study that you know well and thoroughly understand. Then focus on the needs of the listening audience and think of ways you can challenge, intrigue, surprise and hook your audience into your presentation. Think about whether a visual aid would help your presentation and most important - try it out on a real live audience.

Commentaries

These were done well on the whole this year. There are two sets of criteria for the commentaries the first, AO1, focuses on the appropriate use of linguistic terminology. This was generally done well the only exceptions being where candidates used terminology 'for its own sake' without relating it to the actual texts. The second set is AO2 and this focuses on linguistic choices. Good candidates were able to take an overview and explain their linguistic choices in terms of the stated purpose, audience and genre. Weaker candidates tended to rely too heavily on a checklist of linguistic strategies.

Conclusion

It was good to see a more equal take up of the four tasks this year and encouraging to see confident and effective work done on the scripted presentations. Many centres still appear to restrict the choice for their candidates to just two of the writing tasks. It is worth considering that some candidates might do better if offered the full range of tasks available. Each task requires a different set of writing skills and different candidates will find different combinations of tasks will suit their abilities. Also, when considering combinations of tasks, if candidates choose to do narrative writing for task one and a dramatic monologue for task two it is important that they clearly differentiate between the different pieces showing awareness that a piece of narrative writing will have different generic features from a dramatic monologue intended for performance. It is more difficult to demonstrate 'expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts' (AO4) if task one and task two both consist of first person chronological narratives told in the past tense.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw mark boundary	80	68	60	52	44	36	28	0
Uniform mark scale boundary	80	64	56	48	40	32	24	0

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