

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE English Language (6EN02/01)
Exploring the Writing Process

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Introduction

This year moderators reported that candidates had been well prepared for undertaking the AS writing coursework. It was clear that most candidates were aware of the assessment objectives and knew what they were trying to achieve in their writing. Candidates had been introduced to a range of text types and were familiar with different styles and genres. The detailed annotation of work provided by almost all centres demonstrated that assessment was being carried out with careful consideration of criteria. This annotation made it easy to see the process that had been followed when awarding marks. However, moderators did note that in a small minority of centres there was a tendency to limit annotation to a brief reference to the assessment objectives (writing, for example, A01 or A02 in the margins of candidate's work). It is an essential part of the moderation process that centres do offer some explanatory comments about why marks have been awarded rather than just indicate the relevant assessment objectives.

Samples from many centres included examples of all four tasks and it was evident that candidates in these centres had been given the opportunity to attempt the full range of writing. In other centres, all candidates had 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 restricting the tasks to two risked limiting the opportunities for candidates to explore other forms of writing and perhaps develop a wider range of skills. Once again centres are encouraged to give the candidates the opportunity to build expertise in a range of fiction and non-fiction writing by offering candidates the full range of tasks for unit two. The scripted presentation, for example, still seems to be a less popular task with centres. Nevertheless it is a task which candidates often do very well.

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 produced some excellent work at all levels this year. It is a task that involves a range of linguistic skills as well as some social skills including observation and tact. As in previous years the range of subjects chosen for interview was wide and varied and included family, friends, teachers, local dignitaries and celebrities. The most successful candidates were the ones who found an 'angle' from which to view the interviewee. This might be a relative's successful struggle with illness or "my friend the economics genius". One girl wrote a tongue-in-cheek piece focusing on the 'illiteracy' of her sister.

Successful candidates often had a very clear idea of what sort of publication their piece might appear in and what sort of audience they were seeking to engage. Weaker candidates tended to write for an assumed audience of their own peers without a clear idea of the sort of publication in which their piece might appear. It was often possible to discern, within the work of weaker candidates, 'undigested' chunks of an original transcript which hadn't been 'blended' successfully into the context of the article.

Both the following candidates had a clear idea of where their work might be published and who their audience might be. Both also had a clear perspective on the interviewee and kept their attention firmly on this particular angle throughout the article. The focus and angle is made clear in the opening paragraphs of each piece:

Example One

SUPER NATURAL

Abbie, 16, is an aspiring wildlife conservationist. She has always passionately engaged with the outdoors and now is a natural history film-making and presenting enthusiast. In her spare time she makes mini-film documenting her local wildlife which she shares on YouTube and her own website.

Example Two

Artist Profile: InFormat

From Dave Pearce trance anthems to Burial, InFormat gives us the lowdown on being a teenage producer.

HAVING BEEN greeted by a casually dressed T_____ W_____, I'm told to climb two floors before reaching the top of this tall house and being ushered into his large bedroom. At just 16, it's as typical a teenage boy's room as you'd expect: clothes strewn about the place, duvet sheets in disordered mess at the bottom of the bed and various miscellaneous items in not-so-organised positions about the room. T_____ grins, "Sorry, it's not particularly clean!"

Examiner's Comment:

The intended publication of Example One is a local newspaper for the Devon area. The opening paragraph puts the interviewee clearly in the context of her involvement with natural history and conservation. We know we are going to be reading about a local teenager who is doing something unusual and relevant to the area.

The opening to the second example provides a very different preferred format, MixMag, a specialised music magazine with an intended audience of young people familiar with the genre of music covered by the magazine.

However, the essential journalistic elements – Who is it about? What do they do? Where are they? Are common to both pieces.

Another way in which both these pieces show control over the genre is in the way they blend direct quotation and reported speech seamlessly into the discourse.

From Super Natural;

So why wildlife conservation? It's incontrovertible to say that it's important to all of us, for our own survival, at least, but Abbie feels that it's more than that. "There's an endless list as to how wildlife benefits humans ... and what right have we to take away a life unnecessarily"

People are now becoming more and more aware of issues such as global warming and mass deforestation which is good news for life, but Abbie still feels these problems are 'played down'. Seeing as we're the only planet we know of to support life surely all forms of it are important.

Examiner's Comment

There is a mixture of direct speech from Abbie and a summary of her views by the journalist. In the commentary to the piece the candidate states that they avoided the personal pronoun so as to make sure that Abbie's views were 'centre stage.' It is clear that the views expressed about conservation here paraphrase those of the interviewee not the journalist. They are given in the context of direct quotations.

The candidate who wrote Example Two shows skill at weaving journalist comment on the subject himself with direct quotes:

Spending hours on Soundcloud and Beatport searching for music to listen to and play, T_____ definitely takes his time to ensure that his sets are always fresh and exciting. "One of my favourites is this little blog called 'trapdoor' which is completely dedicated in posting trap songs." You can be assured, if there's a new, weird genre that people are starting to discover T_____ will already have heard of it.

Examiner's Tip

Focus is the key to success. Focus and having a definite 'angle' on the interviewee which is sustained. In addition, to gain the higher marks candidates need to use a variety of ways of representing speech and to be able to blend reported speech, direct quotation and comment together effectively.

Narrative Writing

Once again this was a popular task. There were many effective pieces where candidates clearly had at their disposal a wide range of narrative strategies

acquired from critical examination of appropriate stimulus texts. However, moderators did identify two pitfalls which candidates sometimes encountered with this task. One was where candidates had not used an oral anecdote as a starting point and instead attempted to write a story in a familiar genre such as fantasy or romance. In these cases the writing often seemed less convincing and more prone to cliché. The other danger was to rely too heavily on the substance of an oral anecdote, in which case the finished product read more like a plain recounting of a memoir with little deliberate shaping of the narrative.

The example discussed below is one that steered clear of both of these hazards. It is a narrative based on a friend of the candidate and her feelings about an encounter with her estranged father, an artist. The candidate takes the situation described in the original narrative and crucially, the emotional effect on the protagonist, and uses it as the basis of a carefully structured and developed short story. The story is told in the third person but in the early part it focuses on the point of view of the daughter called Aria as she visits the gallery where her father is exhibiting his work.

Example Three

Programmes containing a list of the exhibiting artists lay on a table and Aria picked one up, immediately seeing her father's face on the cover. There he stood, highlighted by the glass of the pamphlet; his smug countenance and plump figure standing proudly beside his pieces.

Aria carefully made her way around the gallery, ignoring the disgusted looks of the visitors and exhibitors. She didn't care. Aria had always felt she was too clever for art. She felt there was more to be said for a person who excelled in English or Science or Maths. Regardless, the looks from the pompous gathering didn't cease.

Rounding a corner, Aria came to a sharp halt as she saw her father and his exhibition ahead of her.

A million emotions whirled around her body and her palms began to sweat but she straightened out her jumper, took a deep breath and stepped forward.

At this point however, the candidate shows her skill with narrative by postponing the confrontation between father and daughter until the end of the story. Instead, we have a narrative shift to an earlier period and we are shown several short cameo scenes which 'show' rather than 'tell' how Aria's resentment of her father has its roots in the way he treated her and her mother in the past. At the end of the story we're back in the present day and the final scene has Aria making a break with her father and his obsession with money as she walks away having been unable to buy one of her Dad's art works. Here the candidate resists the urge to go for a melodramatic declaration at the end but instead goes for a much more muted but nevertheless emotionally eloquent ending.

Aria bit her lip. How she longed to say something. How she longed to scream and tear his horrible artwork down and rip it to shreds. How she longed to say all the words she wanted to. She sighed, shaking her head at the notion. Picking the black velvet pouch up from the table and turning away.

"Timewaster," she heard Mark curse as she walked away.

Aria looked back over her shoulder at the man, his face now aged and his hair receding. She smiled and softly said, "Take care Dad."

Examiner's Comment

This extract highlights three areas which can be useful to consider when constructing a narrative. They are point of view, chronology and the use of narrative shifts in time and finally, how to construct an effective ending. One that makes its point with some subtlety without ending on too melodramatic a note.

Task 2: Texts for a Listening Audience

Scripted Presentation

Although this was not the popular task this year it was generally done very well by candidates who attempted it. The stilted essay formats that sometimes appeared in previous years are becoming rare now as candidates increasingly attempt to engage the listening audience through relevant, engaging talk and attractive, illuminating visual aids. Increasingly candidates are tackling quite challenging topics from language study and when the candidate is on top of the material this can result in excellent work. The examples below are from candidates who chose challenging topics from their language study to present to their peers thereby meeting the requirement given in band 5 to tackle an "ambitious language topic". However, they have also chosen topics which are intrinsically interesting to their audience thereby making the task of fulfilling the criteria to suit differentiated purposes and audiences. Candidate A chose to do a scripted presentation on 'Ambiguity in English'. A challenging topic and one with which some audiences might find it hard to engage. However, the candidate's opening is both surprising and intriguing:

Example Four

"This sentence is a lie."

By launching straight into an ambiguous statement like this the candidate enacts the linguistic concept under examination. The candidate continues;

Am I telling the truth, or just lying? If I'm telling the truth and this sentence is in fact a lie, then I'm lying because the sentence is telling the truth.

Having got the attention of the audience the candidate then goes on to explain the linguistic foundations of ambiguity, the key role of context and the difference between syntactical and lexical ambiguity. At each stage of the explanation examples are given;

Lexical ambiguity, however, can become incredibly complex and difficult to understand. Will Will will the will to Will? Sounds like a tongue twister, or that you just love the word 'will', but broken down it does make perfect sense. Will, (the modal auxiliary verb), Will (a person) will, as in to leave someone something the will (a document of possessions) to Will, another William? It sounds crazy, but there are quite a few examples of where English can be utterly repetitive because of its homophones.

Examiner's Comment

The complex linguistic/philosophical concept of ambiguity is here made lively and accessible through the use of relevant and entertaining examples. The candidate admits that some aspects of the topics are difficult to grasp.

...to be honest , I don't fully understand all the details about why things sometimes do and don't make sense, but they can have some entertaining results.

Nevertheless, the candidate still succeeds in putting together an entertaining and informative piece on a challenging subject.

Examiner's Tips

Choose a topic that is challenging but interesting to your audience. Use carefully chosen examples to engage your audience. Admit it when you don't understand the concepts.

The following candidate has chosen an even more challenging subject, forensic linguistics, but one which they manage to make interesting for their audience:

Example Five

So, let's look at author identification first. To a linguist examining text is basically analysing a 'code' but in grammatical and lexical form. Their job is deciphering who has written it, by looking at the words, the syntax and layout. They ask questions like: Do they use colloquialisms? Is their text written with a certain tone? Does it reflect words only used by people in certain parts of the country? ... Are they using textisms? Or even simple things like how the person addresses themselves, 'meself' or 'myself'.

Having put the topic into a theoretical context the candidate goes on to illustrate the practice of forensic linguistics by giving a brief account of actual murder cases where the success of the conviction depended on evidence from forensic linguistics.

Examiner's Tips

Research the linguistic topic thoroughly. Try to broaden the scope of your topic beyond purely descriptive linguistics so that any general relevance beyond the immediate field of language study is brought out and the audience can see the relevance of the topic to their day to day lives. Both of the presentations described above dealt with language issues which had relevance and significance for people beyond the field of language study. Ambiguity is a potential source of confusion and misunderstanding in day to day conversation and also a fruitful source of comedy. Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic theory to solving crimes and convicting criminals.

Dramatic Monologue

Candidates are getting much better at setting their dramatic monologues out as a scripts and thinking about how the pieces might appear in performance. It is far less common to come across disjointed de-contextualised stretches of internal stream-of-consciousness. Some candidates chose to select well known figures as the subject of their monologue and these were often effective. Among the literary characters featured in monologues this year were Sherlock Holmes and Alex from 'A Clockwork Orange'. However, the majority of candidates created their own characters with their own unique idiolect. The most successful monologues were not just able to create a unique character with a distinctive personal voice; they were also able to exploit the potential of the genre for dramatic irony. The character in the following monologue is encapsulated in the initial stage directions.

Example Seven

(Ruth is sitting in a chair, shuffling her papers. She is a highly-strung woman, with a neat black jacket and pencil skirt, small glasses perched on the end of her nose a stiff upper lip and her black hair is severely parted into a tight bun ...)

When she starts to speak she confirms this initial impression of a stern matronly lady who it turns out has a high valuation of her own importance. However, in the language she uses we also get a strong hint of the character's snobbery;

I became a teacher to help people. To help students to learn. To live. To experience and be ready for life in the wide world.(she sniffs) St. Francis' Public School is an esteemed institution and the pupils here are expected to become the best of the best: politicians, lawyers doctors and academics. As such they only hire the best teachers, like myself.

Some students lack the social development which it is our aim to nurture. (2.0) And some of these students, both male and female would be very compatible. (Ruth clears her throat)It is clear to me that some burgeoning relations between my students are present and ought to be encouraged in order to fulfil their ... social requirements.

Since it is obvious that my colleagues are incapable of noticing, nor acting upon these, it has fallen to me to guide and facilitate their attachment through structured placement within the classroom. (1.5)Whilst in my care, I will see to it that those who ought to be "together" are sat together.

For example, my finest work is the matching of Johnson, Eric and Gregory, Anna from Class 5. ... Their families are of a similar social standing; both fathers are giants in the entertainment industry and a match between the two would benefit the families greatly.

Examiner's Comment

As the dramatic monologue begins to unravel the audience sees more and more of the truth about this character and her manipulative behaviour with her students and in spite of her own high estimate as to her virtues the audience is likely to come to a very different view of her behaviour.

In a similar way in the following monologue, 'Plain Jane', the candidate presents a picture of the speaker of the narrative in the initial stage direction and speech only to reveal the 'truth' by stages. The candidate uses the device of the candidate composing a letter out loud as a way of telling the story of Melanie an actress married to novelist Sebastian.

Example Eight

My Darling. (scribbles out). Seb. No. Sebastian.

The initial uncertainty over how to address intrigues the audience. The story unravels deliciously

I saw your book in a Waterstones on the High Street ... 'New and Recommended', congratulations Seb. Send my congratulations to Gareth; the cover is perfect, really beautiful – I couldn't help but buy it. You were so secretive. I just had to read it.

As the speaker reads the novel of course she finds out about her husband's affair and worse she finds herself depicted in the novel. The humour depends on dramatic irony as the audience, like the speaker, quickly realise that the plot of the novel is actually her husband's account of the affair. As she goes on to comment the sarcasm is cutting.

It's lovely that you've got such a strong female character. Desiree is everything a woman should be; it's obvious you think so. She's so bright and witty; she

certainly takes Aidan (good name by the way!) down a peg or two! They're so perfect together. I was really rooting for them.... and next to Desiree .. who would pick Jane? Plain Jane?

Eventually the sarcasm switches to bitterness as the speaker confronts her husband in her letter, finally revealing an unexpected twist. The confident and chatty tone of the opening is replaced by a more hesitant, fragmented voice that strongly suggests her emotional vulnerability;

That's where your characterisation went astray Seb. She always knew. You say it on every page, in every sentence. It's obvious ... You thought she knew. Aidan didn't but you did ...(pause) ...(defeated) I didn't know Seb. I didn't know. I wasn't Jane. I haven't been suffering in silence as long as you thought ...and I don't intend to.

(Melanie signs her name, puts the letter in an envelope and writes Sebastian's name and address on the front. She sticks a stamp in the corner. She picks up her bag, puts on her coat and leaves.)

Examiner's Tip

Good candidates are able to use a variety of features of the spoken voice to create distinctive and memorable characters in their monologues. The most able candidates can create highly effective entertaining texts by taking these characters and placing them in a dramatic context which creates tension and curiosity in the audience which is then resolved during the course of the monologue. In other words they tell a story.

Commentaries

Commentaries were also done well this year. Centres are preparing candidates well so they know what sort of comments will be relevant. The best commentaries were, as always, those in which candidates were able to link linguistic choices in the process of creating texts with genre, purpose and audience. Candidates are getting better at making reference to choices in their own and in stimulus texts. However, there are still a few centres where candidates are not encouraged to reflect on what they have learned from their study of other texts. Once again centres are reminded that, it is a requirement of Mark Bands Two and Three for the commentaries (A03) that candidates should make some reference to language choices in their own and stimulus texts.

These extracts, from the authors of two of the pieces referred to above, show how the candidates locate their work securely in terms of audience and genre:

Example Nine

Commentary for the MixMag piece on a teenage music producer.

I chose to interview an aspiring music producer. I thought this would make an interesting article for 'MixMag' as T _____ is just 16. I found it also to be a technically useful article as the magazine has an established fan base of electronic music fans. I was able to implement a range of subject specific lexis from the semantic field of music production such as 'launchpad' and 'moombahton'.

I had to concentrate on details of the article that would make it suitable for 'MixMag'. I had to rewrite some sections to put it all in the present tense (unlike previous drafts) as the magazine would be.

Example Ten

Commentary for the Dramatic Monologue 'Plain Jane'

I got the inspiration for my monologue from a musical called 'The Last Five Years' by Jason Robert Brown. The story of an aspiring actress and her boyfriend/husband who becomes very successful as a writer. She begins to tour and he cheats on her. Eventually he leaves her and she is left "still Hurting", according to her main song. I adapted the character of Cathy near the end of the relationship and created a new scenario where Cathy (renamed Melanie) leaves first because of the content of his writing.

Choosing the style of a letter opened up many opportunities for me. I was able to use some features of written language that would be familiar to a listening audience as well as those of spoken language. By opening the monologue, "My Darling ...Seb ...Sebastian," the audience is directly plunged into what the character is doing and how she feels about her correspondent; she loves him but the subject of her letter forces her to be reluctantly formal. Particularly towards the end, I attempted to imitate the stream of consciousness style of writing in 'Mrs Dalloway' by Virginia Woolf, as I felt that this was a clear way of displaying to the audience all of the emotion that she had been holding back.

Examiner's Comment

Here the candidate is discussing the sources of her inspiration, her 'stimulus texts' and the use she has made of them. She is also discussing the linguistic choices she made when writing the text and explaining clearly the thinking behind them. What makes it an effective commentary is not the linguistic knowledge displayed, although it is clear from the commentary as a whole that she is comfortable with a wide range of linguistic concepts. At this stage the candidate is more concerned with explaining the writing process and the research and decisions which led to this particular piece of work. A check list of linguistic features could be offered here but it would not illuminate the writing

nearly as effectively. The following candidate does use a range of sophisticated linguistic vocabulary early on in the commentary for his journalist interview.

Example Eleven

I used authorial intervention to present T_____ in a positive light by displaying what he said through narrative report of action, such as "eyes ... determination", and adding inquirys to direct speech, "explains passionately." When introducing T_____ to the audience I used free indirect speech, "T_____, songwriter," so that I could craft what T_____ told me in the interview rather than simply giving the audience information. I often took T_____’s words and used them as indirect speech. I did this to make the article more concise and increase the positive slant by manipulating what he said (T_____ confesses that he) I used narrative summary of speech act to decrease repetition. I say, "T_____ keeps referring back to ...," to suggest that he repeated his point but without me doing so in the article.

Examiner’s Comment

Although there are a number of specific linguistic terms here there is no sense that the candidate is simply ‘feature-spotting’. Each linguistic point is supported by a relevant example and put into the context of what the candidate was trying to achieve in the text. The previous commentary on ‘Plain Jane’ in fact uses less technical linguistic vocabulary, however, her piece is clearly focused on explaining the choices made when composing the monologue and the reasons behind them in a way which is clear to the reader and she is equally successful in explaining the writing process.

Examiner’s Tips

It is important to focus clearly on the process of writing and the choices made during the process. There cannot be a formula for an effective commentary. The areas of linguistic choice that are prioritised in the commentary will depend on the nature of the piece of work which is being commented on. Appropriate linguistic terminology in the commentary is rewarded under AO1 in the mark scheme for the commentary. However, what is appropriate will depend to some extent on the nature of the task which is being discussed. For example a piece of creative fiction like the monologue above might call for more ‘literary’ terms such as ‘stream-of-consciousness’. Technical vocabulary should be relevant and helpful in illuminating the linguistic choices made in the composition.



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