

GCE 2008 English FAQs

1) What support will be available for new centres?

There is a wide range of support available for all centres.

Ask The Expert

Specifications

SAMS

Getting Started

Student Book

Teacher Guide CD ROM

Scheme of Work for AS

Exemplar coursework material for Unit 2

Unit 1 marked exemplars on website for Literature and Language & Literature

Please visit the English pages:

GCE English Language

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lang/Pages/default.aspx>

2) Will I be able to see exemplar material for coursework?

GCE English Language

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/english/lang/Pages/default.aspx>

3) There appears to be no non-coursework option in the 2008 specification. What can overseas centres do if they want to offer this qualification?

QCA directed all awarding bodies to make a decision about whether to offer coursework for English. The decision was that coursework would be offered. Details of how to approach the coursework are contained in the Specification and 'Getting Started'.

There is also an Edexcel Student Book and Teacher Guide CD Rom for AS which is an interactive book for students to carry out independent learning-ideal for a tutorial college. You should have the Specs and Getting Started in your centre but all of these resources can be obtained from the website.

4) What are the teaching links between Unit 1 and 2?

Unit 1 involves the students in the analysis of spoken, written and multimodal texts which informs their own creative production in unit 2. The well known adage to read as writers (Unit 1) and write as readers (Unit 2) applies. Unit 1 recognises patterns of language use which they are able to discuss in their commentaries on their own production.

5) For Unit 1 what advice about exam answer timings should I give my students?

Look at the number of marks available and apportion the time accordingly.

6) Will there always be a transcript of spontaneous spoken language?

There will always be spoken language, but spoken language may be more or less planned. There may be a single speaker or there may be conversations.

7) What types of texts will be used?

Section A

This will focus on short, complete texts, so if poems or short stories were used, they would be very short ones (for example, the mini-saga form in which a complete story is written in a certain number of words, 50 or 100). We shall avoid extracts.

The terms 'Literary' and 'feature journalism' are used in the widest sense, to give an idea of the range from which these complete texts will come. Advertising shares some features with literary text which is why it was included under this heading. The majority of electronic texts are written, but because of the way the various media work, they have a lot in common with spoken text: they are interactive, they are often as implicit as casual or intimate conversation and often context dependent. They represent an interesting blurring of the categories, so it's useful for students to think in terms of a speech/writing continuum, rather than there always being a clear distinction between the forms.

The important things to remember is that firstly they will be complete texts, and secondly, if the students understand and have been taught to apply the key concepts:

- the contextual factors of field, function, tenor and mode
- the wider social context and issues, for example age, religion, gender, power and status, the pragmatic aspects of a text
- the key constituents of language

they will be in a position to handle the widest range of texts that either Section A or Section B might present to them.

A short single diary entry could be seen as a complete text, so it's possible that these may be used. Personal letters tend to be longer and therefore would not be used. Students who had been taught about the key concepts of language would, anyway, be able to handle these texts with confidence. They should think of this as a test of their skills and understanding and need to know that they can analyse any text type that comes up, even if it's one they haven't specifically covered. They will be more confident if they think in terms of a language 'tool kit' that they can apply to any form. We want to present them with material they can analyse using the skills they have learned.

Section B

We're very interested in the different ways students will respond to this exam, and we have no preferred way of their doing this. We hope to share some of these responses after the first round of exams. QCA defines research and theories very broadly, including the students' own research. Students need to be aware that there are theories relating to issues of gender, status, social and cultural roles etc, but the exam is not looking for an account of theories, it is looking for an understanding of language issues as they relate to data the students are given to analyse and discuss. A candidate who can discuss aspects of the data showing he or she has the relevant theory in mind (for example, if a candidate suggests that a speaker - or even a writer - is using positive or negative face and this is a reasonable point to make in reference to the data) would be credited with having an awareness of theory.

The concept of persona relates to the way people, when they are writing or speaking, present themselves to the world. People don't present their 'real' selves, they have a range of ways they want people to perceive them and a close study of the language they use can identify this. The question is not: who is this person really, but who is this person addressing and how do they want this audience to perceive them? The examples given in the Sample Assessment Material mark schemes should help to define what is required here; the way each writer is trying to present themselves in a way with which the audience will identify and sympathise. Students don't need to have previous knowledge of the person or who they 'really' are, they just need to identify the ways in which the writer/speaker is presenting themselves to their audience.

Unit 2

1) Is the talk marked on the language knowledge shown in the content or on the effectiveness of the presentation?

This task is assessed on AO4 - demonstrate expertise in the use of English and is worth 20 marks.

For AO2 the focus is on the techniques required for a spoken presentation.

A good starting point to explain to students is the difference between an essay and a talk.

2) Is it necessary to record and transcribe the interview?

Yes. Effective interview techniques is one of the skills that students should develop. To be able to replay their work and reflect upon the skills needed to elicit response and conduct the interview is invaluable in this process. After all the skill of asking questions is central to many jobs: journalist, doctor, lawyer, counsellor, mentor, police officer, teacher.

Learning the skills of transcription is also vital.

3) Will my students be penalised if their word counts only just meet the minimum word count

There is positive advantage to effective editing which often leads to work which is close to the minimum limit.

4) If the student is producing a narrative for Task 1 do they have to record an anecdote or can they make use of secondary sources such as museum, library and online oral history resources.

Yes. Here is a link to some :

<http://www1.edexcel.org.uk/espec08/english-lang/wrapper.html>

Sheffield oral history site : www.ourselvesourplace.org.uk

5) My student has recorded an interview with his grandfather in preparation for the journalism task. There is some interesting oral narrative in it. Can he use this instead as the basis for the narrative writing

Yes he can. Students can have the option of deciding what to do with materials they have collected.

6) Is there a non-coursework mode

No. The requirements of the course include compulsory coursework.

7) Can a student create a non-fictional dramatic monologue?

If there is a single voice, and the overall effect is dramatic (in the 'Dramatic Monologue' sense of the word)

The commentary will obviously need to be concise. The reference to style models is to give the students a chance to show that they have observed the effectiveness of what another writer does, and used that form themselves. We are not looking for detailed stylistic analysis of their own writing, more an awareness of deliberate choices made with an overall effect in mind.

The Student Book and the Teachers' Guide are now both available, and give a lot of detailed and helpful guidance.

Notes

We have an English community on our website, which can be used for communication between teachers wishing to share ideas.

<http://community.edexcel.com/forums/p/248/616.aspx#616>

There is a voiced-over presentation from the senior team giving an overview of the specification on our website, which has proved very useful for centres.

<http://www.edexcel.com/gce2008/english/Pages/Overview.aspx>

8) What different aspects of students' writing are assessed by A02 and A04?

There is a crossover between these AOs in that one assesses the understanding of concepts and issues, and the other assesses the ways in which the candidate has used them to create an effective text.

It's possible that a candidate may demonstrate an understanding of a concept but is not able to apply this understanding fully, in which case you would reward under A02 the candidate's understanding that, for example, perspective could be used to create an effective narrative text, but not reward so highly under A04, as the candidate's writing is uneven in the way this concept is handled.

You could try dividing your assessment of the text into two: the first one where you assess what the candidate has tried to do; does this show that he or she understands the way that narrative works? For example, the candidate might open the narrative at a moment of high tension, rather than taking a fully chronological perspective, which you feel is a good way to begin the type of narrative the candidate has tried to write. You would reward this under A02, as

it shows that the candidate understands the use of chronology in narrative and the ways it can be manipulated to create specific effects. Another example may be that a candidate decides to write from the point of view of one specific character in the narrative, possibly not the POV of the person who told the original oral narrative. If this use of POV would lead to an effective narrative in this case, then you would reward this under AO2.

The second part of the assessment would consider the ways in which this understanding was realised in the text. The candidate might use these devices, but not very effectively, in which case you would not reward so highly under AO4 which assesses the candidates use of concepts such as chronology or point of view.

9) Is it necessary to cross out all notes made by students on exam papers or should they be left to support the answers?

As with all exam papers we need to avoid confusion so plans, notes and rough work should be clearly labelled and a line drawn through.
If the candidate fails to complete the question examiners would read the notes.