



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
In English Language and Literature
Paper 1: Voices in Speech and Writing (8EL0/01)

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Introduction

This unit comprises the first of two examined components of AS Language and Literature and has an explicit focus on the concept of 'voice'. It assesses understanding of how spoken voices are formed and how written voices are created in non-literary and digital texts as well as how texts are formed for specific audiences, purposes and genres.

Section A required candidates to transform the review of Anna Whittham's novel *Boxer Handsome* by Flemmich Webb from the anthology into a script for a short section of a podcast about books and reading. Section B required a comparative analysis of an unseen article by the former prisoner and academic Ed Schreeche-Powell, and the extract from Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* from the anthology.

For Section A, there were many centres that had prepared their candidates thoroughly for producing scripts for the podcast genre and they were clearly practised in creative and technical writing; such candidates, who had also reviewed the source text thoroughly, excelled in this task and produced highly convincing and engaging scripts suitable for use in broadcast media. Successful responses demonstrated understanding of the genre, with a confident grasp of crafting language in an appropriate register and style. At the lower levels, there was some significant over-reliance on the source text, making those responses less convincing and original.

Less successful candidates interpreted the task as an interview between two speakers, thus limiting their ability to produce a fully convincing response. While some of these chatty responses were reasonably entertaining, achievement was often restricted due to limited understanding of context: the new text would not have been suitable for use as a script for a podcast host. These candidates were usually trying to imitate spontaneous speech in advance, which is clearly impossible. Wherever appropriate, candidates were rewarded positively for their originality and skill, but this type of misinterpretation of the task can be self-limiting.

In Section B, the majority of candidates were familiar with the requirements of the task, demonstrating the care with which centres had prepared them. Some candidates approached the two texts as separate entities but most had clearly practised a comparative approach; the level of nuance and subtlety of the connections explored did vary greatly. There were some more effective responses for this question where candidates were confident in their discussions of *De Profundis* and understood the thematic links to the unseen text.

Successful responses resulted from careful selection of the most pertinent areas for comparison dependent on the nature of the unseen text and its links to the anthology text, such as the attitudes and values of the writers or the connected themes and topics. Many candidates had been well-prepared on the anthology text but found it more challenging to find meaningful links to the unseen. Across all levels, candidates were confident and detailed in their discussion of issues of context, audience, purpose and tone. This year, candidates were increasingly able to back up this kind of discussion with appropriate terminology and analysis of specific literary and linguistic techniques.

Overall, candidates produced work which was often engaging and insightful, showing how well centres had prepared them for the exam and the ability of the candidates to write creatively and analytically. Where centres should continue to focus this preparation

is in exploring a wider range of genres and text types, identifying the different methods and techniques used by writers and speakers to shape meaning. Familiarity with a fuller range of forms and devices would better prepare candidates for the writing task as well as developing confidence with unseen texts, enabling them to make more subtle and perceptive points about meaning, rather than relying on a prescribed approach.

Similarly, developing detailed knowledge of a wider range of both literary and linguistic techniques would significantly improve candidates' ability to compare the two texts in Section B with real insight. Many candidates rely on 'labelling' word classes (often inaccurately) for very little purpose. This can also hold them back from analysing the pragmatic meaning of the language or its specific effect and purpose.

Section A - Question 1

The "Creation of Voice" task presented candidates with the review by Flemmich Webb of Anna Whittham's debut novel *Boxer Handsome*, and asked that it be transformed into a script for a short section of a podcast about books and reading. Candidates were given specific instructions that the podcast would be called *Books of the Year* and that the script should be written for a planned recording by a solo presenter.

It was expected that candidates would exhibit the following skills:

- Understand contextual factors and genre conventions.
- Consider how the text is received, with confident crafting of the text.
- Control their own writing style by employing a clear structure and avoiding lapses in clarity.
- Produce a text that engages by using carefully chosen language features.

Many candidates were innovative and imaginative in how they approached this task. A variety of relevant writing techniques were employed, including direct address to audience, references to previous or future episodes, sound effects or music and structural devices, all of which would help make the podcast script fit for use by the presenter and production team when making the episode. Some of the best responses also showed a perceptive understanding of how these techniques could be combined to keep the final audience engaged in the podcast, as well as conveying the content to the listeners.

At the lower levels, candidates struggled more with adopting a form, style and register appropriate for the podcast genre and an entertainment purpose, potentially mixed with reviews and conveying information. Some candidates produced texts that had more in common with a monologue, either including extensive "lifting" of the source material or simply paraphrasing the source material with no clear sense of genre, providing little to interest or entertain. There were some responses that seemed more like a short video script than a podcast script, with detailed visual cues and stage directions, although these often contained highly appropriate scripted speech for the presenter and were rewarded for this. This may indicate some insecurity around the genre of podcasts for some candidates. Candidates should be clear within their script if their intention was to write for the subgenre of the "visualised podcast", and centres should ensure that

candidates do understand that the majority of podcasts are produced for a listening audience.

Centres should note that the task will never require the transformation of an Anthology text into spontaneous speech. It has been a concern in this and recent series that a significant minority of candidates attempt to “script” informal chatter between speakers. If in spoken mode, the question will always require candidates to write a planned script, designed to be read out by a speaker. Centres should remind their candidates to read the question carefully before answering. This series, candidates were told that the “script should be written for a planned recording for a solo presenter”, yet a surprising number of responses contained an imagined conversation between two presenters or a spontaneous interview with a guest.

Responses at the higher levels demonstrated clear understanding of how to write a podcast, transforming the written review into highly engaging, subtle and often sophisticated scripts that were convincing as a script ready to be produced into a show for a listening audience. These responses were well planned and included carefully chosen information from the source text; this kind of selective, organised approach produced the most convincing and relevant writing.

Question 1 tasks provide the opportunity for the creative use of a range of literary and linguistic devices, such as those candidates have explored when reading or listening to other writers’ work. Candidates who attempt to imitate these interesting and imaginative writing techniques in their own work can be rewarded highly for AO5.

Section B - Question 2

The “Comparing Voices” section required a comparative response focussing on how writers shape language to create a sense of voice. The candidates were required to explore connections between two texts linked by the themes of prison and personal development; the first Oscar Wilde’s *De Profundis* taken from the anthology, the second a previously unseen article by former prisoner and academic Ed Schreeche-Powell. It was expected that the candidates would exhibit the following skills:

- Organise the structure of their response and write in an appropriate register and style.
- Apply appropriate concepts, methods and terminology.
- Support the exploration with a range of relevant examples.
- Display knowledge and understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and of the writer’s craft.
- Show knowledge of contextual factors and the ability to link this knowledge to how texts are produced and received.
- Explore connections across texts.

There is some evidence that timing continues to be an issue with this section of the paper. Candidates should ensure that they leave enough time for Section B, as it is worth 30 out of the 50 marks for the exam.

On the whole, this task was completed with some confidence by candidates and most had been prepared to adopt a comparative approach; centres appear to be developing the ways in which they teach students to explore two texts at once. Most responses considered a range of similarities within the two texts but candidates, on the whole, were reluctant to consider differences or contrasts, so this is an area on which most centres can continue to work.

At the higher levels, candidates approached the unseen text with confidence and were able to discuss both sources as whole texts, understanding what the writers were trying to achieve for their respective audiences, purposes and contexts and linking this explicitly to the linguistic and literary techniques employed in each text. Many candidates had an effective academic register and knowledge of terminology and were able to use this to evaluate meaning across both texts with contexts of production and reception in mind.

Some centres had prepared candidates well for the extract from *De Profundis*, including a thorough understanding of the methods used by the writer to reflect on his prison experience and the complex contextual issues leading to the imprisonment itself. This enabled many candidates to comprehend the thematic link to the unseen text and make sound comparisons in terms of when and where they were produced and the potential impact on their respective audiences. It was encouraging to see that many candidates, for example, noted how both writers explored the positive outcomes from their sentences, such as the practical benefits of education outlined by Schreeche-Powell and the spiritual development described by Wilde. However, some candidates were not so well prepared and struggled to find meaningful links between the two texts.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, even at the higher levels, candidates were sometimes far more confident on the anthology text than on the unseen, leading to imbalanced responses. Centres should continue to explore a wide range of unseen texts with candidates to increase their confidence in approaching new material in the exam. Many candidates would benefit from more careful planning of their comparative response, and this approach could be reinforced by centres through regular practice of annotating unseen texts and creating plans for a comparative analysis.

However, there were also candidates who were clearly not at all familiar with the Anthology text either, effectively writing a comparison of two unseen texts with a good deal of reading to do under exam conditions. This led to misunderstanding of the Wilde text and some inevitably brief responses.

As in previous series for this exam, the range and relevance of concepts, methods and terminology explored were often a discriminator between the lower and higher levels. Higher level responses linked features to meaning and context, exploring the writer's choices and their effect in detail with relevant exemplification. "Feature spotting" occurred more frequently in lower-level responses, particularly where linguistic understanding was limited to the labelling of word classes with little further explanation of how these words created meaning. Responses in the higher levels showed more careful selection of evidence and tended to explore these quotations in more depth, even where the comparisons made were perhaps a little obvious.

Most candidates were able to comment on contextual factors with varying levels of sophistication and detail. This was not always matched by equal analysis of the writers'

methods or techniques, or by equal knowledge of technical terminology. Often their understanding and comparison of the two texts is sensitive and subtle, but they are unable to support their ideas with sufficient specific subject knowledge. This series, at the higher levels, there has been an improvement in the range of methods and techniques explored but there is still room for improvement across all levels. As this qualification encourages an integrated linguistic and literary approach to the analysis of texts, there is a broad range of approaches to take when exploring the writer's craft and the shaping of meaning. Centres should continue to encourage candidates not to limit themselves to such a narrow range of, mainly linguistic, techniques to discuss for this paper and start to move beyond just commenting on word classes, semantic fields and rhetorical devices, for example.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Read the question carefully and follow its specific demands. This is particularly important for Question 1 but also for Question 2 where the description of the task can vary.
- Avoid writing “spontaneous” speech for Question 1; the task will always require a planned script to be read out by a speaker if in spoken mode.
- Plan responses for Question 1 with a clear understanding of genre, audience, purpose and context. Focus on creating an appropriate voice, register and tone based on the task.
- Use a range of information from the source material for Question 1. Remember that this can be combined with additional points or anecdotes as appropriate, and it is not necessary to follow the same structure as the original text.
- Try to make your writing as interesting and creative as you can for Question 1; you could try using some of the methods and techniques you have analysed in other people’s work in your own creative writing.
- Develop a flexible “toolkit” of frameworks that can be applied to a variety of texts for Question 2, along with a range of terminology, rather than relying on prescriptive mnemonics or lists of features, as this can lead to “feature spotting”. Remember that techniques and terminology can be both linguistic and literary, even for non-fiction texts.
- Consider contrasts or differences as well as similarities in the approaches of the writers of the texts for Question 2.
- Always plan your comparative response and choose your evidence from the texts with care, making sure you have picked the most relevant example for every point.
- For Question 2, explore a range of other “unseen” texts to increase confidence when analysing and making perceptive connections with the anthology texts, particularly for audience and purpose.

