



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Language
Non-Examination Assessment: Crafting Language
(9EN0/04)

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General Comments

Thank you to all centres for their submissions for the 2023 series of 9EN04 NEA/coursework. The quality of work for the majority of submissions was of an excellent standard and demonstrates real passion, commitment and hard work by all parties involved. This report will highlight areas of best practice and suggestions for centres and students to enable future cohorts to fulfil their potential.

Task setting and assessment – Original Writing

In terms of task-setting, the most successful centres managed to find a balance between allowing students to choose topics and genres for themselves and directing them towards those pieces which are likely to provide evidence of an ability to demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English. What was abundantly clear from an examination of successful centres was that if students were encouraged to go beyond the obvious in terms of purpose and audience, then the chances of their fulfilling their potential were significantly increased. This included recognising the multiple purposes of most texts in 'real life' rather than a simple choice of inform, instruct, entertain, persuade etc, acknowledging that there are more effective ways of describing audiences than a basic identification by age and/or gender, and choosing viable and realistic genres for the pieces. Most moderators reported that very few centres were limiting their students' choices by insisting that they all choose from a very limited list of tasks or insisting that all students complete the same task. This showed that centres appreciate that not every student has either the aptitude or the interest to write effectively on a topic or in a particular genre that they have had little or no choice in undertaking.

Where restrictions were placed upon students in terms of the selection of genres, purposes and audiences, it was often with the best of intentions, as it was clear that the message from previous reports, that the highest marks should be reserved for work which provides sustained evidence of 'a highly engaging response' and which demonstrates an 'assured control of the genre'. However, it should also be emphasised that all assessments should be based on a combination of the nature of the task (level of challenge, ambition, originality etc) and the measure of success in realising it.

There was clear evidence from the range of folders reviewed by moderators in this series that there were occasions when some students would have been better advised to undertake what might be regarded as a less ambitious task, but one that might provide a more convincing and successful realisation. An example which emphasises the above points would be a centre where a significant number of students wrote describing a holiday location in the style of a blog or an online travel article. Whilst this is a viable task for practising writing skills and classroom discussion it is unlikely to be of equal advantage to all members if imposed as final pieces for submission on a group of students of varying abilities, experiences and outlooks. The selection of style models and the way in which they influenced students' writing was also commented upon by moderators. Maximum effectiveness was achieved by those students who selected pieces that contained features (of structure, register, lexical choice etc) that were worthy of emulation and/or adaptation and that were appropriate to the envisaged piece. By selecting style models that offered a complex range of features, often led to a better discussion of the relationship between style model and original writing and demonstrated that the student appreciated how and why aspects of the model could feed into their own piece and provided material which contributed to the AO3 and AO4 aspect of the commentary.

Overall, moderators commented on the high standard of work seen across the board, with some folders submitted that were undergraduate-worthy in their written style and scope of academic enquiry and composition. Many students had tackled challenging genres and topics, with one moderator commenting on the diverse range of tasks they had seen including, *‘a couple of amazing poems ... politically focused topics and interestingly – quite a few about teaching – the crisis, SEND and a couple of interviews with teachers’*.

Short stories and narrative fiction were still very popular choices this series although moderators did comment on problematic aspects when it came to the handling of fiction, both in terms of the work produced, and how it was assessed. Some centres had submissions where many candidates produced high quality fiction folders, usually supported by strong commentaries. Typically, such successful submissions showed evidence of students having researched their chosen fictional forms or sub-genres in some depth. Teacher annotations and comments often showed very close engagement with the students’ texts and were suggestive of having set very high standards. Here, there was sometimes a tendency to mark a little severely, especially at the top end, and where centres had many strong candidates, they were often spread over too wide a range of marks, for example placing work towards the bottom of Level 5 or into Level 4 that was comparable with work that might have been the best in another centre and deserving of high Level 5. It is important (regardless of the genre) to ensure that each individual folder is benchmarked against the assessment criteria and exam board exemplars, rather than against other work in the submission.

Conversely, there were centres that over-rewarded fiction pieces that failed to show the understanding of genre, and skilful or sophisticated selection of techniques. Writing for children tended to assume that this was largely matter of simplifying language relative to writing for adults, rather than displaying specific skills associated with children. Careful research into children’s fiction would show that successful writers for even quite young children (with the exception of ‘easy readers’ aimed at very early readers) do not avoid complex sentences and polysyllabic vocabulary, for example. Indeed, much guidance from publishers for potential children’s writers emphasises the importance of avoiding ‘talking down’ to children, who typically relish being introduced to interesting sounding words and playful grammatical structures.

On the other hand, when writing for more mature audiences, too many students indiscriminately used techniques that may well have seen them rewarded highly at GCSE. Students used to being rewarded for texts stuffed with the proverbial ‘fronted adverbials’ and other literary and rhetorical techniques have a tendency to overuse them in ways that do not reflect styles that would make it past publishers and editors. Some teachers praised as ‘assured’ or ‘sophisticated’ work that was overwritten in this way, or quite basic features such as alliteration that did not contribute significantly to the text’s impact in relation to genre, function, or audience.

Given the wealth of writing guidance available online from publishers, literary magazines, agents, and the organisers of writing competitions, students should be able to identify where their work might be submitted, and to discuss in their commentary exactly how it meets the requirements of its publishing context.

As mentioned in previous reports, this component is designed to foster independent study and it is always encouraging to see where students have been challenged with either their choice of writing, their focus of enquiry or their wider reading. As ever, it was a pleasure to read the

work of students, and moderators commented on how much they have enjoyed moderating the work of such committed and hard-working individuals.

Most centres continue to use the free resources available from Pearson Online, such as previous training material and exemplar scripts to provide their students with ideas and to help in assessing work for this component. Moderators commented that it is helpful to see where centres standardise their assessments with this exemplar material. A few centres would benefit from paying more attention to the moderator reports, the material available online and making use of the Pearson Online Advisory Service for help with genre choices and titles. There will be online coursework training available later in the year for those centres who might need a refresher in how to prepare students effectively and assess their work accurately for this component.

From this overview a number of general suggestions follow:

- Using the same style model for a number or even all of the students in a centre should be avoided, as it is unlikely to be equally effective for all users. It tends to discourage students from taking ownership of their writing, as they are not fully invested in the topic and do not have to think carefully about their audience.
- Students should spend time researching suitable style models and the genre and context they want to write for, as this will help ensure their pieces are well-focused.
- Suitable texts for style models should resemble the student's choice in genre and/or audience, or in certain language features, but not in topic, as this compromises the originality of the text produced.
- Poorly written and unattributed models from the internet should be avoided as these are likely to produce poorly written pieces.

Commentaries (AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4)

In terms of commentaries, the best examples involved the prioritisation of the most significant and salient features of the texts rather than attempting to include references to most, if not all, of the stylistic, structural, and linguistic features employed. Students who have achieved a good range and variety in their AO5 Original Writing submissions will be able to meet the requirements for the higher mark bands in AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4 without having to work their way through all the methods for each of the pieces. The natural consequence of this is that commentaries which follow a formulaic or 'checklist' method, irrespective of the nature of the task undertaken, are very unlikely to achieve top marks, as the recommended word limit for each commentary does not enable a detailed discussion of the significance of every single language feature.

Annotation of folders and internal standardisation

There was widespread agreement amongst the moderating team that most teachers/assessors within centres had taken on board advice about the necessity for and the nature of comments on students' folders. The very best practice in this area saw detailed comments either on the work itself or on a separate assessment sheet, in which the assessors clarified how and why marks had been allocated by referencing (though not copying verbatim) the relevant aspects of the marking criteria. Sometimes the current standardisation folders were used for comparative purposes, and the deliberations of second (or even third) markers were appended to provide evidence of internal standardisation, which was excellent practice. However, there

were still some folders with little or no annotation of any sort, and it should be remembered that the Code of Practice for GCE states that 'the awarding body must require internal assessors to show clearly how the marks have been awarded in relation to the marking criteria defined in the specification'. Those that just quoted directly from the marking criteria with no guidance to the moderator as to how it was relevant to the specific folder, and those on which any comments written were directed to the student rather than the moderator, were also not so helpful.

In a small number of cases there was the sense of the letter rather than the spirit of guidance being met. A couple of centre's submissions appeared superficially excellent with plenty of marginal annotation, summative comments and evidence of work being seen by a second marker, but on looking closely at the work, comments were largely just quotations from the mark criteria dotted around the script without obviously being anchored to features of the work that matched them.

Although there is more than one way of meeting minimum requirements for annotation, it would benefit both teachers and their students to adopt the best practice that has now been repeatedly shared. Very few centres now use the separate marking sheet where they state a page and paragraph number with a comment next to it: this must be more awkward to complete for teachers than writing the comment on the work itself at the appropriate place and is certainly tricky for a moderator having to cross reference the comments with the work by scrolling through the work on screen. It is recommended that this approach is avoided, along with the also rare practice of offering only summative comments with little or no annotation in the body of the work.

Centres are increasingly also including, either on a separate sheet (which is helpful), or on the authentication sheet, a clear description of the genre, audience, and function of the work. The best practice, now quite widespread, also makes clear where the work would be intended for publication, broadcast, or performance.

Administration

This was the second year of electronic submission of NEA via the Learner Work Transfer (LWT) portal and, for the most part, there was a noticeable improvement in the accuracy of folder submission and the majority of centres had uploaded their students' work, including the highest and lowest marked folders by the deadline (15th May). The entry of marks on the Pearson website was also excellent with very few centres having to be chased for marks or advised about incorrect entries.

The completion and submission of Authorisation Sheets was very good, and any errors were actioned promptly by the centre concerned. There were one or two centres where marks were adjusted as a result of internal moderation and the marks on the Authentication Sheet were not synchronised or marks were incorrectly entered on the Pearson website.

Overall, it must be emphasised that the vast majority of centres, teachers and students provided moderators with ample evidence of a wide range and variety of writing tasks undertaken with skill and imagination, combined with incisive reflections on the writing process. As one moderator reflected, this year was *'overwhelmingly positive, with the best centres being those who had evidently explored many different types of writing styles and genres with students, balancing this with appropriate guidance and steering, as students then*

pursued tasks and produced pieces which genuinely reflected their own interests and aptitudes'.

Finally, I would like to add my own personal thanks to all those involved who made this moderation series both successful and enjoyable.