



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In A Level Russian (6RU04/01)

Unit 4: Research, Understanding and Written
Response

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This unit is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society.

This was the final resit opportunity for this unit. There were 61 resit entries, and the majority of these scored highly. Candidates who had been comprehensively prepared for the demands of the examination were able to perform well.

Structure of the examination

This unit requires candidates to answer three questions in two and a half hours. The translation (section A) is worth 10 of the 100 marks available and a proportionate amount of time to spend on it would be 25-30 minutes. Section B and Section C are each worth 45 marks, and so an hour on each of these would represent appropriate division of time.

Advice to centres

The number of overlong answers to questions in section B and C has reduced significantly over the life of this specification. In this resit opportunity, there were very few overlong answers. For section C, quotations, proper nouns and dates may be excluded from the overall word count. Examiners stopped reading at the end of the sentence in which the 200th word lies.

In both Section B and Section C, overlong answers lost marks for Organisation and Development, and it was also often true that they failed to answer the question fully, as key information was contained in the section that lay beyond the word limit. There were very few short answers, as always, but where an answer was short, it often contained very little information or argument and therefore scored very low marks.

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

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list in the specification
- Divide your time carefully in the examination and do not spend too long on any one part
- Learn grammatical endings for verbs and nouns thoroughly, paying particular attention to the use of cases after prepositions, as this is the weakest area for many candidates
- Seek to incorporate a range of more complex grammatical structures into your written work, such as conditionals, subjunctives, compound conjunctions, gerunds and participles
- Write your essay in paragraphs so that the examiner can follow your points
- Ensure that your handwriting is clear and legible. Good presentation will make your essay much easier for the examiner to follow.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage is split into 30 assessable elements and one 'point' is gained for each correct element at the marking stage. A mark out of 10 is awarded based on the number of correct elements (see the mark scheme). For an element to be considered correct it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and all the grammatical endings (case endings, agreements and verb endings) had to be correct. One spelling or transliteration error was allowed per element, if it was not grammatical and did not affect the sound significantly when read aloud.

Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. It remains the case that some native speakers lost marks due to the omission of elements. As is the

case every year, those with very little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks, perhaps 1 or 2, despite knowing much of the required vocabulary. They often gained points for elements such as 'хотя', 'часто', 'или когда' and 'нужно', these elements having been designed to allow candidates to gain marks at the lower end of the scale. Those who have not mastered at least some of the more complex grammar required at this level will not perform well. Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- 'the government wants' – 'государство' was often used instead of 'правительство'
- 'on the way' was often incorrectly translated
- 'but in the evenings' was often translated as 'in the evening'
- 'cheap, tasty menus' was often not known

Section B: Creative and Discursive Essays

Creative Essays

In the creative essays in Section B, the best essays (scoring 13-15 for Understanding and Response) were succinct and succeeded in telling the whole story in the space available, or built sufficient suspense to leave the reader wondering about the character(s) or what might happen next. There were various back-stories suggested for 2(a) – the most successful of which had a strong narrative (and even fantastical) element, rather than pure description. 2(b) also gave rise to some very creative and varied responses. There were no answers to 2(c).

Poorly planned creative pieces often contained lengthy scene setting or description of character but little action. Writing a successful piece of creative writing in 200 words is a challenging task and not something which should be embarked upon without first planning content or structure. There were very few completely irrelevant essays, although some were considered to be 'pedestrian' or failed to grab the examiners' attention. They usually scored no more than 7-9 for Understanding & Response ('satisfactory [...] response to stimulus').

Discursive Essays

Most of the answers written in this section continue to be in response to the discursive essay questions. Many candidates wrote extensive plans on their examination papers and such good practice is to be encouraged as carefully planned essays were, in virtually all cases, more successful. Careful planning by candidates results in balanced discursive essays where the ideas are well thought through and it seems difficult to conceive why a candidate would choose to launch into such a piece of writing without a plan.

Question 2(d) was very popular but was not always successfully answered, as candidates had not read the question carefully enough. Rather than answering the question as to whether or not young people understood the dangers of new technology, some candidates took this question as an invitation to discuss whether or not new technologies were dangerous or not, or to discuss the merits and disadvantages of new technologies. Some answers did not include any reference to young people at all.

The most successful answer to question 2(e) gave specific examples of how countries can apply ideas from other countries and/or explained how certain ideas could be applicable in one country and not another or the powerlessness of the ordinary tourist to make any changes in his or her own country. A couple of very interesting essays discussed the value of experiencing education in another country (e.g. in a UK boarding school) and being able to apply knowledge in the student's home country.

In question 2(f), the most successful essays here considered how the cleverest students would be identified and whether there should also be some type of means testing as well.

In answer to question 2(g), there were some very perceptive essays on this subject, but there were also rather a lot of factual inaccuracies, such as over the number of countries in possession of nuclear weapons. Many candidates managed to produce very balanced and mature reasoning and argument on this subject.

In order to score 10-12 or 13-15 for Understanding & Response, essays must be balanced and consider both sides of the argument. One-sided essays can score a maximum of 9 for Understanding & Response and some overlong essays were considered one sided as the entirety of the second half lay beyond the 200th word. Such essays scored a maximum of 9 for Understanding & Response and also for Organisation and Development, even if they were linguistically impressive.

Balanced and well-structured discursive essays should have a conclusion in which the candidate comes down on one side or the other, but until this point, the best candidates remained neutral themselves and discussed ideas in abstract terms, avoiding the use of the first person.

In order to score 9-10 for Range & Application of Language, learner candidates are encouraged to use wide or more complex constructions, such as passives, gerunds, relative clauses, compound conjunctions and conditionals. A range of varied essay phrases is also useful as this enables weaker candidates to score higher marks.

They should be aware, though, that a string of such phrases is not able to make up for a lack of content or ideas; careful planning and consideration of the depth of ideas which the candidate has before beginning will result in a better essay across the board. Candidates should also be encouraged to ensure that they have sufficient topic vocabulary when they select a discursive essay to answer. It is perfectly possible for candidates to achieve 5 for Accuracy for their discursive essay; indeed, many learner candidates did so. Accuracy does not have to be perfect to achieve this, but the essay must show an impressive command of noun and verb grammar and give the impression of accuracy throughout.

Section C: Research-Based Essays

The Section C Research-Based Essay was well handled by most candidates. Some candidates' essays demonstrated their considerable, in-depth research and showed an impressive command of language and structure, and this was mostly evident, as always, in question 3(d).

In question 3(a), although many candidates could discuss an ecological problem, few were successful in presenting their argument as to whether regional or local government was currently doing enough to solve the problem. There was a dearth of specific evidence in most essays.

In question 3(b), many candidates could present detailed information on a historical figure, but the information presented on whether or not people today understood that figure well was often either lacking entirely or presented as an afterthought. The most successful essays had this thread running throughout the essay.

In answer to question 3(c), the social problems identified were not always backed up with a lot of evidence or information and often the essays contained general knowledge rather than facts or analysis relating directly to Russia. Alcoholism was the most frequently discussed topic. Many candidates stated what government was doing or should do to tackle the problem, rather than addressing the question as to whether it wanted to tackle the issue or even could do so.

A good range of works was covered for question 3(d), including many on the new specification, and most candidates were successful in identifying a significant theme and analysing whether the author or director depicted that theme successfully, although this second part of the question was normally not given enough prominence in the essay.

Candidates are reminded of the importance of addressing the question on the paper; essays which did not actually answer the analytical part of the question scored a maximum of 13-18 for Reading, Research & Understanding. In order to score 19-24 or 25-30, essays need to offer opinion and analysis as well as factual content. This will usually involve stating a fact and then telling the reader what this fact shows us or why it is important or relevant. Conversely, the stating of opinion without sufficient evidence will also often lead to lower marks; the requirement for this unit is that candidates do detailed, sustained research in advance and come to the examination armed with facts which they then use to back up their analysis. Candidates are reminded of the importance of writing a structured essay in this section. Those candidates who had written detailed plans virtually always performed better, and the examiners again expressed surprise at the relative lack of such plans. There were many essays which gave lots of factual information but which were really, in essence, a regurgitation of all that is known on the topic or the plot of the book or film they had read; candidates must use their factual knowledge to answer the question and support their assertions if they are to reach the higher mark bands for Organisation & Development. Essays should have an introductory paragraph and a conclusion which refers back to the question set on the paper.

Centres are reminded that quotations do not count within the word limit and that proper names need not be included. Very few essays contain a bibliography or sources of information. Whilst this is not a requirement for the higher mark bands, some 'facts' used by candidates did seem unlikely and proper referencing of sources would help candidates to prove that they have done extensive research.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for all papers can be found on the website at:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>