

Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language A (4EA0)
Paper 03

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Introduction

This unit is based on two assignments, one Reading and one Writing. The Reading assignment is a response to Section B of the Edexcel Anthology, with the texts chosen by centres. Candidates may write about any number of texts from this selection, though the majority write about one or two. The Writing assignment can be on any topic, and any genre: again, the choice is the centre's. Word length is not prescribed. All tasks are chosen by the centre.

Administration

Generally, the administration was excellent. With a few minor exceptions, the work arrived on time and was appropriately packaged. Almost all centres sent the coursework authentication sheets and the coursework frontsheets, and these were usually filled out correctly. There were a number of centres who sent the top copy of the OPTEMS with the moderation sample, but this should be sent to Pearson at Hellaby. A small number of centres sent the OPTEMS only and not the actual sample but the sample is already selected and indicated on the OPTEMS, and centres should send the asterisked candidates, along with the top and bottom folders if not already included. It was most helpful where centres identified the top and bottom candidates: checking through sometimes hundreds of entries to see if both have been included is a lengthy chore for moderators. It also significantly reduces the time if the frontsheets are placed at the front rather than the coursework authentication sheets.

The folders should be attached by staples or treasury tags, not plastic envelopes or paper clips. Sometimes centres send loose sheets, which inevitably causes problems for the moderation process.

All the marks should be on the frontsheets: the mark for Reading, two separate marks for the Writing, and the totals. There were quite a number of errors in the adding up of marks, and in transferring marks from the work to the frontsheet. Another error occurred when centres had altered a mark at moderation but not transferred it to the frontsheet. At times there were crossings out on the frontsheet which made it difficult to see what the final mark was.

Centres should discourage handwritten pieces: they really do not help the candidates to present their work properly, and put candidates at a disadvantage since they cannot make changes in the same way as those who type their work.

Reading

It was good to see more of a range of Reading assignments and tasks from many more centres this year, thus allowing candidates to write more to their individual strengths. Some centres, however, covered a very narrow range of texts. Usually there were questions on two or three texts, individually or combined for comparison, but in some cases it seemed that only one text had been taught, and frequently there was only one task set. This led to a batch of very similar essays, with similar points and textual references being made by all

the candidates. It is very difficult for candidates to give an original, personal response in these circumstances.

'Disabled' was by far and away the most popular text. Quite frequently, candidates drew on a small group of pieces centring on 'Disabled' and including 'Last Night', 'Out, Out--' and 'Refugee Blues'. Many coursework titles tended to be rather broad, focusing on a general analysis of the poem instead of a specific thematic or character focus: these less focused titles tended to be less successful

Specific comparison is still being used too frequently as a task; the more able candidate can often cope with this, but less able candidates simply jump about from text to text finding supposed differences – the boy is actually dead, whereas the soldier is just disabled, for example, on Frost and Owen. In a few centres, candidates attempted to compare three or more texts and this really is a challenging exercise if it is to be anything other than listing similar and different aspects. It is important to bear in mind that comparison can be within the text, and does not necessarily require cross-references between texts. There was a tendency in some centres to offer very broad titles, inviting candidates to find their own points of comparison by asking them simply to write 'A comparison of...', but this was almost always unhelpful to the candidates.

It has been noted in previous reports that candidates often do not make any reference to different genres when comparing a poem and prose piece. There was some misunderstanding of 'Last Night', including the belief that it was a short story, (and, in one or two cases, that it was written by Charlotte Gray). Genre differences can be a very productive way of comparing texts because of the focus on the writers' use of different conventions and techniques. It can be particularly useful in examining form and structure, which candidates often find very difficult. Since there was sometimes a lack of detailed analysis in the work of even the most able candidates, a task which specifically targets the writer's methods might be more useful than a more general one. An exploration of how a writer evokes pity, or sympathy, or tension, or humour places an analysis of techniques as central to the discussion.

There did seem to be a move to tasks which limit candidate response by focusing on a minor feature; "Consider the portrayal of men and women in 'The Last Night'" or "How is death portrayed in 'Veronica'?" are two examples. There also seems to be an idea in some centres that what the candidate has read can be used to illustrate some broader theme such as the effect on an individual of disability or the rise to power of Hitler; this theme is then assiduously researched and much evidence is offered but very little close reference is made to the texts and especially not to the language and structure of the piece.

A number of centres offered 'context' in the form of historical or biographical details as the introduction to reading responses. Such centres seemed to be working to a formula – 'begin with context.' When the context was then integrated into the response – for example, how the experiences of Owen can be seen in the realism of his poem – the contexts added to the quality of the response. In many centres, however, the context was simply a separate and

largely irrelevant paragraph, often almost identically worded in each folder. Introductory comments on the fame of de Maupassant, for example, do not help candidates to form their own reading of his short story. The context which illuminates the text can be useful in helping the candidate to form their own reading of the text, but only if the candidate understands the relevance and significance of the contextual information and applies it as part of their own original interpretation.

Writing

There is a great deal of freedom allowed to centres in this assignment, and the best results came from those centres who offered a range of tasks to their candidates. The writing section should be one where independence and creativity is allowed to flourish, and the impression was that this element of coursework was quite restrictive in many cases. There seemed to be too many centres that had one title for every single one of their classes, regardless of their candidates' particular strengths and interests. Where candidates did produce independent work, it usually resulted in something engaging (at the very least) and something utterly compelling and enthralling in some instances. The lesson here seems to be that we should trust our candidates and give them the space to produce something individual.

Overwhelmingly popular were short stories, or narratives of some kind. Some were based on the work of other writers, though this was not always made clear. There were a few examples of work written as a continuation of a novel or short story, but these are often unsuccessful for many candidates. Many candidates were able to adopt and sustain a voice, or shifts between points of view as well as shifts of time which gave good evidence of their ability to craft and structure their writing. There was some excellent descriptive writing and compelling short stories and pieces of personal writing, but in some centres the default position seemed to be gore and horror, particularly for boys. Very many pieces included one death, or several, and there were examples of the narrator dying at the end, raising the usual questions of how he or she managed to tell the story. There was, unfortunately, no lack of the dispiriting 'It was all a dream' ending. A number of candidates handled the fantasy genre with some freshness and originality, but it tended to lead to very long and derivative pieces of writing.

Writing tasks developed in relation to individual candidates were on the whole more successful. Where candidates were able to draw on their own experiences, or on topics of particular interest, travel writing for instance, it was often the case that they could describe those experiences in convincing detail. Candidate knowledge and experience did sometimes distract in persuasive pieces, however; candidates sometimes forgot that they were arguing a case, because they were too busy supplying information about a particular topic. Further, where the experience was too close or too traumatic for candidates, for example, the death of someone close, they were unable to gain the distance needed for the crafting of language.

There were still a lot of Writing tasks with no title or indication of what the task was. Some centres allowed or encouraged their candidates to produce inordinately long pieces of work for both assignments: 12 sides for Reading and

the same for Writing at one centre. It does not do the candidates any good as the work easily becomes rambling and repetitive and loses focus, and some of the best work seen by moderators was relatively brief and focused, addressing the tasks succinctly without sacrificing detail.

Some centres interpreted the assessment criteria for Writing rather generously, seeing crafting and cohesion for which there was little evidence and overlooking many flaws of expression. There was a tendency in a number of centres to place work in Band 4 when the assessment criteria would point to Band 3.

Annotation

The quality of annotation varied from centre to centre. There were some examples of excellent practice, where centres used marginal notes and summative comments informed by the assessment criteria. In those cases it was possible to identify and follow the reasoning of the centre in order to determine how accurate the centre was in applying the criteria. Many centres supported that logic with a process of peer and department-level standardisation. In such places moderation was straightforward, and, more importantly, the centres tended to be accurate in their marks. In other places the centres left the candidates' work blank, or, equally unhelpfully, annotated only with random-seeming ticks. Also unhelpful were words such as 'Good', 'Well done' or 'Much better', intended to encourage and motivate the candidates. The annotations submitted with the work are for the moderator who needs to understand the reasons for the marks awarded. In some centres there was a clear mismatch between the comments and the marks, so it was difficult to perceive why the final mark had been chosen. There was much evidence of internal moderation but it is less helpful when simply a changed mark, initialled, or a laconic comment such as 'better than this'. The more evidence the moderator has to support the centre's marks the better. The most helpful centres are annotating quite fully and giving summative comments which show what they think the candidate has achieved in terms of the assessment objectives.

Assessment

Across the centres assessment was largely accurate across the range, but some moderators noted a tendency to generosity in the marking of Reading assignments. In the main, this was confined to centres where only limited evidence could be found of internal standardisation taking place. The generosity tended to be placed in Bands 5, 6 and 7, where description and explanation was over-rewarded as analysis.

Reading and Writing have, of course, separate criteria. However, even when they know they are assessing Reading rather than Writing, many teachers point out punctuation errors or a poorly constructed sentence but few draw attention to it in the summative comment on Reading so they probably are not giving it weight in the marking. Occasionally, however, two marks were supplied for the Reading assignment.

Conclusion

The majority of centres submitted impeccably presented folders with correct administration. The level of candidates' engagement with the tasks was often impressive, and teachers' comments showed their understanding and application of the assessment criteria. As in previous years, moderators made it clear that they found the task of moderating these folders rewarding and interesting. Centres and candidates are to be congratulated for their hard work and commitment.

Grade Boundaries

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