

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

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

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Introduction

Students are required to produce two pieces of work, one to assess reading, the other writing. For the Reading assignment they write on one or more texts taken from Section B of the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE and Certificate Qualifications in English Language and Literature.

For Reading, students should demonstrate their ability to read and understand texts with insight and engagement, and understand and make some evaluation of how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. For Writing, they should produce a piece of personal and imaginative writing to explore, imagine, entertain, or writing to argue, persuade, advise.

All students will be required to demonstrate an ability to communicate clearly and appropriately, using and adapting forms for different readers and purposes; organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts using a variety of linguistic and structural features; use a range of sentence structures effectively, with accurate punctuation and spelling.

The total marks available are 80, 40 for each assignment.

Administration

A minority of centres did not include the top and bottom folder, if these were not already in the sample. Centres are asked to provide these, and failure to supply them does delay the moderation process.

Quite regularly not all the necessary paperwork was included. Centres should supply the Speaking and Listening records, and the Candidate Authentication Sheets.

It is so much more helpful for the moderation process if work is stapled or attached by treasury tags; plastic folders and paper clips are not appropriate, and lengthen the moderation process.

The coversheet with the marks should be at the front of the folder. It takes the moderator so much more time if s/he has to go through each folder to find the marks awarded.

Centres should ensure that marks are given for both parts of the Writing assignment and clearly indicated on the work itself and on the coversheet.

Please check the addition and transfer of marks to the coversheet as there have been several errors in this process, all of which affect candidates adversely and take time and trouble to correct.

A small number of centres include handwritten pieces in the folders, but this should be discouraged. Such work is often hard to read and usually quite untidily presented.

Tasks

The wording of tasks is important: it can benefit or disadvantage candidates significantly. Some work has no title at all which is extremely unhelpful to both candidate and moderator. It is necessary that there should be a defined task: sometimes the title for a Reading assignment is just the name of the poem or prose piece, and for Writing, a title such as 'Short story'. Tasks need to be defined and directed if they are to benefit the candidate.

Length

There is no set number of words in this unit, so teachers can decide what sort of length they should suggest. For the Writing assignment this will to some extent be determined by the nature of the piece; for Reading, candidates should be discouraged from writing very short essays because they do not allow sufficient development of ideas. However, some students write very long essays which often become repetitive: it is very hard to type six or seven sides and remain focused and incisive.

Annotation

This should be directed at the moderator, rather than the candidate. This is work which has been written to include in the completed folder, so is now ready for assessment by teachers and moderator. Comments which praise the candidate, or offer advice for improvement without showing how and why marks have been awarded are unhelpful at this stage. Moderators do see comments such as 'Well done!' or even 'Good girl!' which are obviously of no assistance to the moderator who needs comments in the body of the work, and summative comments at the end, pulling the evaluation together. Whilst the assessment criteria are paramount, it is important that centres do more than write out the descriptors as this does not show how and where the standards were achieved. An honest appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the work is the best practice in explaining and justifying the marks.

Most centres demonstrate evidence of the internal moderation process, and in some cases this is very detailed and extensive. It can, however, become unintelligible to an outside reader, with no way of understanding the outcome of what amounts to a discussion when the final mark is not clear. Sometimes marks are changed within the centre, but without explanation. Remember that the moderator needs to understand the reasons behind the marks awarded in order to support the marks for the centre, and this includes the reasons for any changes made in the centre's own standardisation.

Assessment criteria

It did seem that in some folders, Reading assignments were marked for writing as well as reading. Centres should note that there are different sets of assessment criteria for Reading and Writing. A small number of centres gave separate marks for each part of the Writing grid, added up and averaged, but this is not the best method for arriving at the right mark. The idea of the 'best fit' is the most useful way to approach this.

Reading

Comparison. It is not essential for students to compare two or more texts to meet this assessment criterion: as has been stressed in previous reports, comparison can be 'within or between' texts. Some of the least effective tasks relied entirely on comparison, with the wording 'Compare *one text* with *another text*'. This meant that the only basis of the assignment was comparison, and this almost inevitably led to disjointed essays in which the student jumped from one topic to another, veering back and forth between the texts. Even where a topic for discussion had been provided, candidates at the lower end of the range often found it difficult to handle switches between texts, especially if the texts covered two genres, and might well have produced better answers by focusing on a single text. In some centres tasks covered three or more texts, and this was difficult for most students to handle without focusing almost exclusively on content at the expense of critical appraisal of techniques.

Detail. It is important that candidates refer closely to the details of their text(s); some centres over-reward work which is general rather than specific, and explanatory rather than analytical. The marking criteria refer to a critical, not just personal approach, and it is hard to demonstrate critical awareness whilst generalising or summarising. Here is where comparison would come into its own, with candidates referring to different parts of a text in their critical analysis, pulling ideas together and integrating them into their own interpretation.

Genre. When candidates write about more than one text, and one is a poem and the other prose, they need to acknowledge the differences in genre and be aware of how this affects the way they are written and the effects on the reader. Surprisingly often the difference in genre is simply not mentioned which does suggest the reading is for content rather than techniques, a restricted approach. Candidates do not always seem aware of genre, referring to the Faulks extract as a 'short story' for example; they should understand that a short story operates by quite different conventions than part of a novel.

Choice. It seems a pity that in some centres candidates are allowed no choice of task. In the Reading assignment, this can have the effect of limiting independence and originality as students tend to make the same points, supported by the same evidence, and frequently in the same order. Teachers understandably want to guide their students in order that they do their best, but too much guidance impinges on students' ability to formulate their own readings of the texts, test out their ideas, and select the most appropriate supporting evidence.

Anthology

It would seem that some centres concentrate on a very small proportion of the Anthology but this is not good practice and does not help the candidates who need exposure to more texts rather than intensive work on two or three. This leads to work which is limited in its scope and tends to reflect the teacher's interpretations and analysis rather than the candidate's. The top bands require a freshness and sharpness of interpretation and analysis which will not come about through second-hand judgements. A small number of centres used the wrong section of the Anthology.

Writing

For the Writing assignment, lack of choice often means that students are unable to select the kind of writing that best suits their abilities. Sometimes, centres allow their candidates only to write in certain narrow ways, such as by adding an extra chapter to a novel, or doing a pastiche of the work of an existing author, but not every candidate has the skills for this kind of task, and may well be disadvantaged if this is the only option. Not all students enjoy and do well at the same kind of writing and it is unlikely that all students in a centre will prefer to write the same kind of piece, often with the same title.

It was impressive to see how well some students handled different voices in their Writing assignment, often manipulating different time scales, or stories within stories. There were examples of robustly argued persuasive pieces, though most centres seem to encourage or prescribe imaginative writing. Evidence of crafting is important in this assignment and can be seen in all kinds of writing. Quite a number of students wrote without giving any title at all, but in order for a teacher or moderator to assess the quality of communication, there does need to be a specific purpose or brief, even it is simply the title of a short story. This is far preferable to 'A Short Story' used in a number of centres. A specific rather than generic title means that it has to have some significance within the writing which prompts the candidate to craft and structure the work so that the significance is clear.

There were depressing numbers of short stories with a twist, sometimes with the cliché of its all being a dream after all. A substantial minority were violent which teachers may feel should perhaps be discouraged.

Conclusion

On the whole, moderators were once again impressed by the quality of work for this unit. Teachers and students had worked hard, and much work was thoughtfully written, accurately assessed, immaculately presented and thoroughly enjoyable to read.

This is advice that moderators would give centres in order for their candidates to perform to the best of their abilities;

- Use the whole of the Anthology
- Make students aware of the significance of genre and its different conventions
- Encourage students to write at sufficient length for Reading assignments so that they can be thorough in their analysis, but no so long that they are repeating the same ideas and examples
- Give students choice for both Reading and Writing
- Encourage your students to be original in their interpretation for reading, and also in their approach to writing

