

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Edexcel Certificate
in English Language A (KEA0)
Paper 02

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Overview

The Certificate in English Paper 2 is a paper lasting one hour and thirty minutes. Question 1 is a reading question based on the Edexcel Anthology and in June 2016 candidates had to respond to the story, "A Hero". Question 2a and 2b are writing questions and both are compulsory. The writing tasks for June 2016 were the text of a talk on the importance of teamwork and a short story with the title, "The Promise".

Examiners reported that this was a very reasonable fair paper, which enabled candidates of differing abilities to demonstrate their skills in reading and writing well. The short story worked well for most candidates, while the writing questions prompted some very interesting pieces.

Reading

Question 1

While many candidates responded well to the story, some candidates at the lower end of achievement wrote very little in response to this question, which perhaps suggests problems with time management but in a number of cases the short responses showed little actual understanding of what 'A Hero' is about. Some of these brief responses were limited in scope and often made a basic point of Swami being scared of the dark. Some responses were longer in length but narrated or paraphrased, occasionally using the bullet points from the question to attempt to structure their response, but with little engagement. Mid-range candidates were able to present the ideas in the text in a clear way, showing the understanding of how choice of words (whether labelled with linguistic terms or not) and techniques create meaning. References to 'a frightful proposition', 'trembling and awake all night' were used to illustrate Swami's fear and young age, and his father's insistence on sleeping on his own 'No, you must do it now', were commented on when starting to explore their relationship. For some, though, discussions weighed more on the relationship between Swami and his father than other areas, which was at times explored well enough and in sufficient detail to allow them access to higher levels as they tracked the development of this relationship thoroughly. Candidates often shone when discussing the full range of character relationships, such as with the mother: "Why do you look at me... I hardly know anything about the boy", "... turned away"; many commented on the grandmother providing Swami with more tenderness and care than his parents: "that good lady", "Don't you want a story?", "put his hand out to feel his granny's presence at his side". However, it would have been useful to see more language analysis. The language analysis sometimes tended to be superficial, such as spotting a simile, rather than exploring the meaning and impact of the particular language technique. Narrative description and lack of textual support limited candidates' responses at times. Here, candidates showed engagement with the overall meaning, but lacked a sustained focus on language, with structure often overlooked and language features not

fully explored in many instances. Candidates who answered this question really well tended to cover all bullet points outlined in the question, but integrated their comments on language throughout their responses. Short quotations were selected for their impact and effectiveness and discussed in detail, rather than descriptively commenting on the narrative before moving on to the next point. There were some excellent analyses of language for effect when Swami was alone at night ('felt cut off from humanity'), outlining the tension, the build-up of his fear and his imagination running wild. Candidates who engaged well with meaning could discuss the dual nature of Swami's character as a frightened little boy who acts "bravely" out of 'despair' and 'in horror' rather than as act of true bravery. Top level answers explored various perspectives of the story, for example the view that Swami can be seen as intelligent and cunning ('tried to change the subject'), speaking 'loudly and with a great deal of enthusiasm', trying to delay his having to sleep alone, his politeness when responding to the inspector's suggestion to join the police, but also recognising his immaturity and fear and the fact that this has not really changed at the end of the story: 'Sleeping beside his granny again!'. When students stuck rigidly to one perspective, this often kept them in the lower levels. The difference in the top two levels was marked by the conviction of argument and perceptive understanding of subtlety of language choices (level 5) and sustained and thorough engagement with the characters' actions and relationships between characters while offering mature interpretations.

Most candidates gleaned from the text that Swami's relationships with his father and mother were weak. Responses mainly ranged within bands 3-5, with a few falling below. The scripts which fell below band 3 tended to focus more generally on the extract with little development of analytical thought and to be narrative in approach, with little in-depth analysis. The best answers tracked through the text and analysed important words, commenting on the writer's intention, connotations of word choice and effect on the reader. Those candidates who fell into the band 5 category were incredibly perceptive, managing to analyse the linguistic features used to present Swami. Perceptive responses were able to balance analysis to all parts of the question: Swami's thoughts and feelings; Swami's relationships with his family; and reactions to his 'heroic' deed. Some candidates recognised the use of the cyclical plot and the relevance of the newspaper article at the beginning, as well as recognising the irony of the title and how Swami's father's overarching aim was to begin to initiate his son into the realm of manhood. At the top end the question gave scope for those more nuanced responses which were able to tease out the irony of the concept of 'hero' applied to Swami in the circumstances of the story. In terms of language, the strongest responses treated language as an integral part of explaining the other prompts. The weakest were those which artificially produced a list of language devices with examples.

Writing

Question 2a

Question 2a was answered well, with the vast majority of students clearly understanding what the task was asking them to do. This question felt like it had real purpose and students seemed to do well at writing for an audience of their peers, indicating that the candidates were comfortable with the question. Many answers were quite predictable, but there was scope within the question for some excellent full mark responses. There was a strong sense of audience in many of the candidates' responses. Most of the good ones addressed the audience directly, with many examples of 'you can see that team work is a good thing/good skill to have'. Some very mature ideas were convincingly presented and a few candidates used the approach of listing the qualities needed or opening the speech with questions as to what makes a good team rhetorically, making apt use of mainly abstract qualities such as communication, patience, confidence, understanding and empathy and developing these in a clearly organised way.

Many placed teamwork qualities as essential to their experiences in sport, working in a group in class, and crucial for success in future careers, giving specific examples that peers could relate to (the TV programme *The Apprentice*, for instance) which, when done with audience and purpose in mind, was excellent. Many likened it to being a in a football/ sports club. A few used the format of 'you must work in a team, but don't know how – I'll tell you/give you tips' formula, which worked well; such candidates achieved levels 3 and 4 as long as their responses were grammatically sound.

There were many noticeable errors in punctuation and spelling and it was a shame to read some very entertaining answers that did not even use a full stop. Examiners report the biggest weakness was the use of punctuation, as the language choices were often ambitious and persuasive, with rhetorical techniques frequently used. There were some examples of single sentence, undeveloped paragraphing; technical issues such as spelling and lack of agreement of tenses were also evident. Some wrote a letter rather than a talk, but those who did adhere to the rubric did well on conveying the sense of speaking to a live audience. The scripts which fell below band 3 tended to be much more basic in their approach and lacked the rhetorical features needed to make this an effective response or showed less awareness of the task's intended purpose and audience.

The best answers chose a few points but developed them well and displayed the ability to create whole text structure. Those candidates who achieved Band 5 were very perceptive and assured in their approach. Although most candidates used the traditional persuasive speech format, giving similar examples of what makes a good team, some band 5 candidates were very original in their approach, using metaphorical examples which befitted the intended audience. Some of these were really enjoyable to read. This seemed to be familiar territory for many candidates and an appropriate

register was established and maintained in most cases with a real sense of audience.

Question 2b

Responses to the question on The Promise were varied and engaging as the candidates approached the question from different individual interpretations. Many of the answers were convincing as candidates shared their personal experiences. Many created tension in the story for effect, ended it on a cliff-hanger, achieved or reached something by the end. This task did seem to trigger quite a few emotional responses from some students. There were also a number of responses which did not take a narrative approach, suggesting some misunderstanding/misreading of the question. Responses that had clear structure and not too complicated narratives were more successful as these enabled candidates to add detail to characters or descriptions to setting and so on. On the other hand, many got lost trying to cram too many events which overloaded the narrative. These were often less secure in terms of technical accuracy and struggled with sentence structure as well as tense control. Similarly to Q2a, many students fell down on punctuation and some basic grammar rules, such as the use of 'your' and 'you're' and subject-verb agreement. Given the creative concepts that some candidates in this range produced, if they had paid attention to basic punctuation and grammar, they would have been placed in a higher level.

Most students understood the task and its requirements but some narratives lacked ambition. The use of spelling, punctuation and grammar was generally good but few responses provided enough variety of punctuation, sentence type and vocabulary to warrant top band marks. There were some imaginative interpretations of the promise, although there were also some clichéd responses too. Overall, it was impressive how many candidates managed to write a decently structured piece in the 20 minutes or so allocated to this question.

The scripts which fell below band 3 tended to be much more basic in their approach and lacked the descriptive and imaginative language features needed to make this an effective response. Although most candidates used a similar idea for the title 'The Promise' (weddings/relationships/broken promises) some Band 5 candidates were very original in their approach, writing some really assured and sophisticated stories. Some of these were really enjoyable to read. This proved to be a successful task for most candidates and some imaginative and well-constructed narratives were produced, covering a fairly wide range of topics. The question found no shortage of appropriate responses, some of them quite poignant with more than a hint of autobiography.

Grade Boundaries

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<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

