

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Astronomy
(5AS02)
Paper 01

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GCSE Astronomy

Overview

The controlled assessment forms 25% of the overall mark for this specification. Candidates must undertake two tasks from lists that are provided in the specification. One task must be drawn from list A, Unaided tasks, and one task from list B, Aided tasks. Candidates must not do comparable tasks from each list. If a candidate chooses A1 from the Unaided list, they must not choose B1 from the Aided list.

These rules provided for a rich variety of tasks that were seen by the moderating team this series. In many cases the tasks that were chosen, were able to complement the teaching of the course and enable the candidates to support work they were undertaking on the written paper 5AS01. Candidates were expected to write the Design, Analysis and Evaluation under a high level of control.

As in previous series some candidates produced high quality work on which, clearly, a great deal of time had been spent. Sadly this was not the case for all candidates. In some cases centre marking was generous. It was pleasing to see that most centres are now used to the assessment criteria so that candidates produce work that is relevant to the task set. In a very few cases candidates provided unnecessary background detail that added bulk to the controlled assessment, but did not meet any of the criteria. Centres are recommended to make sure that candidates produce a controlled assessment that meets the requirements of the specification and keeps to the point as in a number of cases, the time spent on descriptive work could have been better spent by the candidate on writing a report that met the criteria in a fuller way.

Most centres provided the correct candidate record sheet and candidate declaration form. A very few centres provided nothing other than the work the candidate did with no annotation as to how the marks the centre gave were arrived at. Centres should ensure that all samples sent for moderation have a fully completed candidate record sheet and candidate authentication form. A copy of the candidate record sheet can be found on page 59 of the specification.

The choice of tasks was wide ranging, however there remain a core group of tasks that were seen most frequently. For the unaided tasks, A1 Lunar Features, A4 Constellation Drawing, A6 Shadow Sticks, were the most common. In the aided list the most popular were, B11 Drawings of Messier Objects, B1 Lunar Features, B8 Sun Spots and B4 Constellation Photography. In addition the partial solar eclipse earlier in the year offered many centres the opportunity make excellent observations and hence A3 and B3 were also popular.

In some cases candidates failed to undertake the correct task as specified in the approved list in the specification. This was particularly so in the A1 Lunar Features task where a few candidates undertook controlled assessments more akin to looking at phases of the moon and paid little regard to looking at the changing appearance of the three lunar features at

different times in the lunar cycle. In the A4 Constellation Drawing task some candidates appeared not to read the whole brief and failed to note magnitudes, comparisons with reference stars and where possible the colour of stars. In the aided B4 Constellation Photography and B11 Messier Object Drawing Task, it was not always clear as to whether the images were produced by the candidates or sourced from elsewhere. On occasion little observational information was produced to support the images produced. Centres should ensure that candidates meet the requirements as set out in the specification. The specification should be the source of information regarding the tasks. It would greatly assist candidates if they were to write down at the start of their controlled assessment the title of the task. This would provide a focus for the candidate and ensure that the entire requirements of the task were carried out.

An increasing number of centres used robotic telescopes for some of the Aided tasks to good effect. Where used appropriately, the images produced were of high quality and the additional processing of the images gave a useful means of adding detail to the analysis of the chosen task. It should be noted that observations should be images produced from instructions given by the candidate. Pearson Edexcel provides information on the use of Robotic Telescopes in the controlled assessment section of the website, together with other useful material relating to managing controlled assessments.

Design

Many candidates awarded high marks failed to evaluate fully a number of observing sites in the Unaided task or instruments in the Aided task. It was common to see some details about one observing site being given full marks. In addition, the idea of a programme of observations being planned was not evident in the work of many candidates. Intermediate marks were awarded with a closer reference to the criteria, but there was a lack of appropriate astronomical terms in the work of many candidates. To gain a mark in the 4-5 band, candidates should consider a range of sites for the Unaided tasks and a range of instruments for the Aided task. This requires more than a few words. Candidates need to provide details of the advantages and disadvantages of each and provide details of location for Unaided tasks or details of the various observing instruments in the Aided task. In addition a full programme of observations needs to be planned with repeated observations planned in. These should include dates and times and also the equipment needed. In some cases candidates dwelt excessively on trivial details such as hot drinks, food, clothing and other basic necessities that were not directly relevant to the task. Equipment details should be relevant and associated with the task set.

Observations

The quality of observations remains highly variable. Crude sketches, which were unlabelled, were awarded high marks by some centres. In other cases excellent detailed drawings were submitted that met all the requirements. It appears that some centres were unaware of what constituted an excellent programme of observations. In the A6 Shadow Stick task, it is necessary to obtain multiple repeat readings over several days and the timing of readings should enable a good graph to be drawn to gain a mark in the 4-5 band. In

the A4 Constellation Drawing task it is necessary to have multiple repeated observations of the apparent magnitudes of the stars. In many cases, just one observation of each constellation was submitted as candidates focused on the number of constellations to be drawn and then not repeating each observation several times for each of the three constellations. In both the Unaided and Aided Lunar Features task A1 and B1, the features selected must be visible at the times of observation. The link to conclusive data being produced was often lacking as a result. Candidates should provide sufficient observational data to enable full and clear conclusions to be drawn about the problem set in the task title. Observational details should include date, time, and place, observing and weather conditions.

Analysis

There was good evidence of calculations being undertaken and these were then explained and appropriate conclusions were drawn. In other cases, high marks were awarded for attempts at using calculations and explanations. A series of unexplained numbers will not give a clear conclusion and hence elicit a lower mark. As with previous sections, some centres failed to engage with the assessment criteria and awarded high marks for comments and material that were not related to the task. Long descriptions and supplementary material were included in situations where they were not directly relevant. In the A1 and B1 Lunar Features task this was particularly the case, there were many who spent a great deal of time discussing of the percentage of the Moon that was illuminated by the Sun at each phase. A discussion of the shadow lengths and relative sizes of the features based on measurements taken during the observation would have been more helpful. In the A4 and B4 Constellation Drawing/Photography task, averaging detailed comparisons of observed and actual stellar magnitudes based on reference stars together with colour are expected for the higher mark band. In the B11 Drawing Messier Objects task, candidates gave descriptions of the various objects which were not creditworthy. Time should have been spent on discussing how the various objects could be rendered more visible by the use of software and filters. Candidates should be aware that there is a need to undertake some form of processing of the data obtained to score good high marks in this section. Some tasks such as the A6 task on Shadow Sticks or the B6 task on Sundials, or the A8 and B8 Sunspots task lend themselves to this aspect more readily than others. Candidates should be guided by centres into choosing tasks that will meet the specification requirements for this section as fully as possible.

Evaluation

Some candidates clearly need further practice in evaluating their work to enable them to securely meet the requirements of the top mark band. Some candidates spent too much time on general comments about how well or not the task went, rather than objectively discussing the procedure and their means of using data in a context appropriate to the task. Candidates sometimes wasted a good deal of space on unnecessary aspects and then wrote a few lines relevant to the criteria. In many cases feasible suggestions for extensions and improvements were offered, however in a number of cases very high marks were given for non-quantitative statements in situations where a quantitative evaluation could be made, for example in the A4/B4 Constellation drawing tasks percentage differences

could be calculated between the observed magnitudes and the actual magnitudes. In the Shadow Stick task, the error could be calculated between the observed longitude and the actual longitude. In many tasks calculating errors is a possibility, these are just two examples. Very general comments such as 'use a better telescope' or 'look for better sites to observe from' were given high marks erroneously. Candidates need to give a justification for such comments and this was usually lacking together with the appropriate astronomical terminology.

The above issues are now fully exemplified by the samples of Controlled Assessment work, each accompanied by a marking commentary, which are available from the Edexcel website at:

www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/Astronomy/Pages/default.aspx

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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