



Examiners' Report

Principal Monitor Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCSE

In English Language (1EN0)

Paper E Spoken Language Endorsement

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## Introduction

Most centres uploaded their spoken language endorsement (SLE) videos in good time, and most correctly named files according to the guidance in the specification so that they included candidate names and numbers. The file name should also include the grade awarded by the centre to each candidate. Please ensure that candidates introduce themselves by name at the start of each video. It is helpful if they also clearly state the topic of their presentation.

A small minority of centres, submitted their candidates' work in zip files. This is particularly wasteful of monitors' time because each file has to be downloaded before it can be viewed. Another very small minority submitted audio files only, thus making effective monitoring impossible since as it was not possible to evaluate how or to what extent the candidate had engaged their audience.

It is important that centres check the quality of their video files before uploading them, as there were instances where the beginning or the end of a clip was clearly missing. More important, however, is that centres make their recordings in the most favourable circumstances possible so that candidates can be clearly seen and heard. The ideal camera shot should show the candidate's upper body, be front-on with the camera positioned relatively close to a candidate rather than at the back of a room. There were a few isolated instances of cameras being placed on the floor, looking up, or even pointing to the back of a candidate.

Microphones should also be positioned carefully, quite close to the candidate presenting. On occasions, monitors could hear very clearly the teacher who was sitting next to the camera but found it much more difficult to make out what the candidate was saying. It is also quite difficult, at times, to hear the questions asked by other students in the audience.

Centres are reminded that presentations should be made to an audience which must include the candidate's teacher. There were occasions when recordings were made without a teacher being present and this meant that candidates, and sometimes other students, were left to their own devices and therefore not asked any questions at the end of a presentation, which is a requirement of the specification. Remote recordings are acceptable, when the situation demands it, but the teacher must be online with the candidate (in the same meeting) as he or she presents.

It must be said that the great majority of centres complied with the advice and requirements outlined above but it is perhaps inevitable that a report such as this has to focus on the occasions when best practice was not adhered to.

## Reminder to centres on entry codes

'1EN0' is for students sitting the qualification for the first time or students resitting and wanting to make a new attempt at the SLE. **SLE grades and video-recordings must be submitted for these students.**

'1EN0 T' is for students who have achieved 'pass,' 'merit' or 'distinction' in a previous series (with Edexcel or another awarding organisation) and want to carry forward the SLE grade they have already obtained. **SLE grades and video-recordings are NOT submitted for these students.**

Centres may not enter a candidate who is resitting and carrying forward a SLE grade for '1EN0' and enter 'NC' as a grade or fail to submit a video-recording for the candidate. Such an approach will result in the centre monitor contacting the centre to understand the 'NC' or lack of video-recording.

### **The presentations: topics**

On the whole, centres have returned to the video-recording of the SLE, after the pause in monitoring during the pandemic, with considerable enthusiasm and expertise. Centres which fully embrace the SLE clearly understand the opportunities which it offers candidates to research and speak on topics which would not necessarily be touched upon in other parts of the curriculum. Monitors reported a much higher prevalence of candidates being encouraged to choose their own topics, often ones which engaged or interested them deeply.

One monitor noted:

"There seemed to be fewer 'my favourite football team / car' type submissions this year which was good. Some of the topics were very impressive such as the African economy and the American voting system. There were lots of impassioned speeches about gender and abortion/women's rights and it was great to see centres giving candidates the chance to express their views and concerns."

Another listed some of the topics she encountered:

"Domestic abuse

Poverty in Haiti

Defence spending

Communism vs capitalism

Gun crime

Social media (various)

UFOs and Roswell

Animal Cruelty

Comics

Famous people of influence, e.g Florence Nightingale / Stan Lee

Abortion - right or wrong."

Others included "Struggles with Sexism" and "Holding Grudges" whilst one monitor was struck and enthused by two presentations which stuck in his mind:

"one was a lecture on a Goya painting that was erudite, challenging and very insightful, drawing modern parallels with Goya's intentions. The other was a talk about Boris Johnson – the candidate claimed he had abandoned his prepared talk following the ex-PM's resignation – that was witty, analytical and skilfully mimicked Johnson's manner."

Another noted:

"Some will stay with me for a long time: there were around half a dozen from students who had travelled to the UK from Ukraine, and who spoke in depth about their experiences."

What is absolutely clear is that candidates work better when they make their own choices. There have been occasions, noted in past reports to centres, where every candidate in a cohort has been told to talk on a subject set by their teacher, such as "Work Experience". Some candidates may choose this for themselves if they have had a particularly notable introduction to the world of work, but dozens of similar talks, often delivered with little enthusiasm to the same audience, can be extremely limiting for candidates and for the potential of an audience to ask meaningful questions.

Candidates are sometimes encouraged to present on a text from their English Literature course and, again, this can be worthwhile and stimulating but, in practice, often limits candidates as they can lack the interest and passion which seems to drive others.

Not every candidate will have a passionate interest in a topic, of course, and the teacher's role is vital in helping them choose something suitable and then develop it in a way which can engage an audience.

If a candidate is to access the higher grades, the topic chosen must have the potential to be challenging or sophisticated. Purely factual, straightforward material cannot progress beyond Pass grade level. The best topics allow candidates to build arguments and develop a more complex line of thought.

### **The presentations: format**

It was noticeable, this series, that most candidates presented a prepared speech on their own, to an audience of their peers and/or their teacher. There were some examples of group presentations or discussions but, almost invariably, these caused problems for the fair assessment of candidates. For one thing, it was not always possible for the monitor to identify each candidate clearly. Also, it is highly unlikely that each of the candidates involved gets a chance to speak for an equal amount of time. Furthermore, not all candidates get an equal opportunity to respond to questions put to the group as a whole. It is extremely difficult to manage this kind of group format in a way which gives fair chances to all involved.

Presentations should last for up to ten minutes, including questions and responses. Monitors noted that there were some very brief responses of less than three minutes and, although it is possible for a candidate to achieve a Pass grade in such a short amount of time, it is practically impossible for anyone to access the higher grades.

There were also a few presentations which went on for much more than ten minutes and it must be stressed that candidates can gain no advantage from this. A presentation must be subject to the discipline of time constraints.

### **The delivery of presentations.**

The SLE is not designed to assess the reading skills of candidates. It is acceptable for candidates to refer to notes whilst delivering their presentation and there is no prescription about how detailed these notes may be. However, centres are reminded that, in order to be awarded any grade, a candidate must meet all the criteria set down for that grade.

To be awarded a Pass, a candidate must, as well as meeting the other criteria, make 'an attempt to meet the needs of the audience'. For a Merit, they must 'meet the needs of the audience' and 'achieve the purpose of his or her presentation'. For a Distinction, they must use 'an effective range of strategies to engage the audience' and 'achieve the purpose of his or her presentation'.

All these assessment criteria refer to the candidate's relationship to an audience. It is extremely difficult for a candidate to meet these criteria if they read their prepared presentation without taking the audience into account. We therefore advise that all candidates should address their audience to some extent and consequently should not read from a script without even looking at their audience or acknowledging that their audience is present. It was clear throughout this series that candidates who made limited use of notes such as bullet points, or no notes at all, invested their presentations with greater freshness and spontaneity.

The more a candidate relates to their audience, the better their chance of gaining a higher grade and it is essential that they only be awarded a Distinction grade if they use 'an effective range of strategies to engage the audience'. Such strategies are manifold and can include:

- Verbal rhetorical devices such as anaphora, repetition, rhetorical sentences, triadic sentences and lists
- Modulation of tone, volume or expression
- Physical gestures and facial expressions
- Devices to elicit audience participation
- The judicious use of humour.

Centres are advised to re-visit the assessment criteria regularly and pay particular attention to the key words for each grade: **straightforward** for a Pass; **challenging** for a Merit; **sophisticated** and **perceptive** for a Distinction.

Candidates must alight on a topic which offers the potential to fulfil the criteria and then use the appropriate vocabulary, organisation and strategies to realise that potential.

Candidates can, of course, make use of slides and other audio-visual aids but these should be used strategically to support the points they are making. It is rarely effective to use slides containing lists of points to be included in the talk, but a photograph or diagram, produced at the right moment to illustrate a specific point, can be very effective.

## **Questions and responses**

Following a presentation, the candidate must listen and respond to questions and feedback. If a candidate is to access a Merit grade, such questions must be responded to in some detail and, if a candidate is to access a Distinction grade, the candidate must respond 'perceptively'. It is essential, therefore, that questions are ones which enable the candidate to develop and elaborate on their ideas. Questions which are closed and are only designed to elicit a simple, brief answer cannot enable a candidate to do what is required for a Merit or Distinction.

A very experienced monitor made the following observations about this series:

"Some candidates were lucky enough to have supportive audiences who listened attentively and then asked well-structured questions which allowed them to develop ideas in detail. In one centre, a very eloquent question began 'Of course, correlation is not causation, so how would you justify x?' Here, candidates had clearly been taught how to pose relevant and searching questions, and the fluency of responses demonstrated that this was part of normal learning.

Other candidates were poorly served by the questions, or lack of questions, they were presented with. In a number of centres, teachers either allowed the audience to ask a series of closed questions or resorted to standbys such as 'what made you choose this topic?' Others interrupted presentations to begin to ask questions rather than allowing candidates to pause and collect their thoughts. Some questions were phrased obliquely, tagged onto the end of a questioner's anecdote or observation, and others were so long that candidates lost the sense of what they were being asked.

It was extremely disheartening to see several centres where no questions were asked at all, with the recording ending immediately after the presentation. The guidance is crystal clear about the requirement for a Q&A session at the end; candidates cannot be awarded any grade if they do not respond to questions. One centre had asked candidates to record themselves and submit video evidence, which meant that no questions were included and which also removed the opportunity for students to demonstrate the engagement of an audience."

Past reports have advised that audiences are made aware of a candidate's topic in advance so that they can formulate helpful and fruitful questions. It is also the

case that a teacher's role can be crucially important in asking the kind of questions that will allow a candidate to secure a higher grade.

There were occasions when candidate and audience had pre-planned and rehearsed their questions and responses, and even read them out, which does tend to remove all sense of spontaneity and meaningful interaction.

### **Awarding of grades**

**Pass.** Pass grade presentations are those which express straightforward ideas, information and/or feelings. These are often factual reports of a researched area of interest, or one that is close to the candidate's own experience. Examples include accounts of a hobby, or favourite sport, or pet or holiday, where there is no dimension of complexity or discussion. Candidates apply some order or organisation to the presentation and, it is to be hoped, directly address their audience to meet the audience's needs. Pass candidates respond to feedback appropriately and in a straightforward manner.

Monitors can often see and suggest ways in which Pass grade presentations can be turned into Merit ones by candidates introducing elements of debate or complexity to their work. For example, by examining the social and health benefits of a particular hobby through research, they may be able to engage their audience more fully and be helped to expand their ideas with the aid of helpful questions.

**Merit.** Merit candidates express more challenging ideas and their range of vocabulary increases as a result. Their presentations are more securely organised and they may well have a more pronounced interaction with their audience. Often, there is more complexity, discussion or debate and candidates may set themselves a question or conundrum to explore.

Indeed, some centres actively encourage candidates to set themselves a question as their topic. One centre, this series, had Merit candidates who investigated

'Is it ethical to eat meat?' Or

'Can you have too much money?' Or

'Why do we worry so much about what others think?' Or

'Is anything possible?'

Quite a popular area of interest this year was the disparity between people's incomes, e.g. nurses and footballers, and there are many issues in the news that concern young people similarly. Needless to say, it is a vital part of a student's development that they find out about the debates that go on around them and formulate their own opinions.

Merit candidates often stimulate their audience, who ask genuine and searching questions that elicit detailed responses.

**Distinction.** Distinction candidates express sophisticated ideas using sophisticated vocabulary. Their choice of topic, and their approach to it, are

therefore of the utmost importance, although the range of potential subjects is probably infinite.

It is unlikely that a presentation about a favourite football team and its history will gain a Distinction, yet we have seen these awarded by centres for just such a topic – a purely factual account that could have been taken from Wikipedia. There are many ways that the subject can be elevated and expanded, of course. It could lead to a debate about football club ownership, financial fair play, sportswashing, tribal behaviour, group displacement activity and so on. But a limited, straightforward, factual narrative should be awarded a Pass.

On the other hand, although a presentation on the subject of 'Polar Bears' did not at first seem very promising, the candidate developed this into a consideration of global warming and an impassioned plea to save the world's wildlife. It was fully developed, as all Distinction presentations must be, and the candidate used a number of the strategies to engage the audience outlined above under '**The delivery of presentations**'. The candidate was very knowledgeable about the subject and was able to answer searching questions with perception.

There is not only one way to achieve a Distinction, however. One candidate's topic was 'Public Speaking' and this was not inherently imbued with contention and debate. The candidate gave a superb talk on how to speak before an audience and explained many of the rhetorical techniques needed to be successful whilst using those techniques herself. The talk was organised, well-timed, impeccably paced and perfectly judged. It was delivered without notes but with brief sound clips from famous speeches (Churchill et al) to illustrate particular points. Questions were answered with perception.

This series, monitors reported that they were able to confirm most of the grades awarded by colleagues in centres, who are commended for their professionalism and expertise in delivering the SLE. It was evident, however, that the practice of reading from notes, and subsequently the ignoring of audiences, was widespread. Although it can be appreciated that candidates are often nervous and rely on notes for support, there is much to be said for freeing candidates from what starts as a prop but becomes a burden. As one monitor put it:

"It is often noticeable how powerful (and seemingly authoritative) speaking without a reliance on notes is."

Centres are again reminded that candidates must meet **all** the criteria for a particular grade before that grade is awarded, and that the question and response part of the presentation should be treated with due care and attention. It is the section of the presentation which has the most potential to support each candidate.

In conclusion, we are always impressed with the achievements of young people taking the SLE. One monitor stated:

"[the Endorsement] is the most engaging part of the qualification to monitor/assess. I hesitate to use the word 'fun' but candidates have made me

laugh out loud and have made me want to cry this series. There really are some remarkable students out there.”

And another spoke for so many of us, thus:

*“As always it was a pleasure and an honour to listen to the viewpoints and ideas of such a wide range of young people and it enabled me to see their 'views' on the world around us. I would just like to say thank you to each of them for the time and dedication they showed to making their presentations.”*

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