

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE English and English Language
(5EH01)
English Today

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General Overview

Centres and students have a choice of two themes to answer on set by Edexcel. For 2012-2013 these are 'Travel' and 'Festivals' and this was the first series using these themes.

For **Reading** students must complete one reading task individually and following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task. The response must be a written response of up to 1000 words. For the chosen theme students select two texts from the six Edexcel texts provided and prepare by making notes and planning their response to the task. Three texts are paper-based and three are digital, i.e. intended to be read on screen.

The reading response must show that students can:

- make comparisons between two texts
- select appropriate details from two texts to support their ideas
- explore how writers use presentation and language to communicate their ideas and perspectives in two texts.

In **Writing** students must complete one writing task from a choice of two on their chosen theme. Following their preparation they have up to two hours to complete the task and their response must be an individual written response of up to 1000 words. The writing response must show that students can:

- make choices in writing that are appropriate to audience and purpose
- spell, punctuate and use grammatical structures that are accurate and appropriate for purpose and effect.

This was the sixth series of Unit 1 and all students coped well with the demands of the assessment. Students had been well prepared by centres for this component and engaged well with the given tasks and texts. Both topics were well received by students, being accessible and within their experience and these provided students with opinions, experience and knowledge which helped in the writing tasks. Students engaged well with both accessible themes and their chosen tasks and texts. Some centres entered both themes and some smaller centres seemed to have successfully let students choose their tasks and texts individually.

There was an even split between the themes selected although Travel may have been slightly more popular. For the Festivals theme the most popular chosen texts were to do with The Lollibop Festival, Sundae on the Common, Sneinton festival and online article for Edinburgh Fringe. Centres focused mainly on comparing Lollibop Festival and Sundae on the Common poster, especially for low ability students. For the Travel theme the most popular texts were South Eastern Railways compared with 'Find Your Feet'. The article regarding coach travel proved popular with centres' higher ability students - usually compared with South Eastern Railways. For the first time all texts were used in both themes, although some responses treated video and digital texts as printed texts. Digital texts had not always been viewed online. One centre consistently said that the image in The Mail was in black and white.

In the writing task for the festival theme, there was a fairly even split between writing a newspaper article persuading readers about festivals and an online review aimed at young people. Given that there are many online reviews which students appeared to have used as research tools, it was unsurprising that reviews about Glastonbury, The V Festival or Leeds Festival featured quite heavily. This series had a fairly even balance in the choice of writing tasks. In Travel the article had a slight edge on the webpage text. The articles and web-pages showed very good knowledge of a variety of Travel topics including air travel, congestion, safety issues such as wearing seat belts and personal safety, links to environment and weather. It was clear the students enjoyed writing about their ideas. In the web-pages there were some clear and effective ideas with a good range of advantages and disadvantages of using public transport shown – environmental, social, independence, financial, safety, and health.

Feedback on Marking

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently, and there were more centres entering this series given changes to submission and awarding.

Overall, while there was evidence that centres are encouraging comparison it is still the key assessment issue in this unit, despite it being the sixth series. At the

higher bands quality of comparison showed improvement based on other previous series. There appeared to be more specific comparisons this year, quite possibly due to more focused teaching of this aspect, but in a number of centres, students weren't really getting to grips with the detailed analysis that is required for a Band 4 response in this area. There were still some students who treated texts separately with a concluding paragraph or who wrote about points alternately. There were very few students who were able to make discriminating comparisons even though there were some perceptive and insightful comments made about individual texts. At the top end there were some students who produced excellent pieces of analysis of two texts, but where the marks given did not reflect the key part of the task, which is comparison. Some students again had sound comparisons (Band 3) while other bullet points were Band 5, and this needed to be reflected in the marks given. In quite a few cases marks at the top end were inflated because all bullets had been marked at band 5 with sound comparisons. There were many cases where the assessment indicated by annotations and summative comments was very accurate, but the numerical marks did not reflect these comments. For example 'Some good understanding' was accurately assessed but given a mark at the top of a band rather than the bottom. The summative comments mostly were accurate, for example one did identify that there were 'some sound comparisons' which would indicate top Band 2 or bottom Band 3, awarded top Band 3.

Sound comparisons such as 'Both of the texts use their fonts and logos effectively' and 'both texts use colour to great effect' were seen across the scripts. This series it was noted that there were students who had been taught to use discourse markers such as 'On the other hand', 'whereas', and 'however' to start statements which were not comparisons. Centres need to ensure that students are genuinely making comparisons between texts rather than starting a statement about a text with a comparative term, e.g. 'On the other hand Sundae on the Common is aimed at adults it is a poster'. Whilst any texts can be compared centres need to differentiate these to suit the ability of their students. One centre compared the Find Your Feet poster to the Coach Travel article and here, students struggled to find any meaningful comparisons beyond purpose and audience. Consequently, comparisons were not always 'like with like'. As such this highlights the need for centres to carefully select the chosen two texts

both in terms of what can be relevantly compared and the students' abilities for this particular skill area. In terms of the Coach Travel article, even some higher ability students did not show relevant understanding of the writer's purposes. Despite some students highlighting that it was written in a negative tone and that the writer's viewpoint pointed towards a decline in coach travel holidays, there was very little discriminating analysis or close scrutiny of what the writer was mainly complaining about which was the quality of food and not specifically the coach or holiday. Only a small number of students recognised that the audience would not only be holidaymakers but tour operators as well.

There seemed to be a rise in students commenting on colour as a presentation technique in rather tenuous terms. Students who mentioned the colour green as symbolising the need for a more environmental approach when walking to school in the 'Find Your Feet' poster could be justified as could primary colours in the Lollipop Festival appealing to young children. However, trying to link the colours the teenagers were wearing with comments like 'pink representing girls and blue for boys', using a pink sky in the South Eastern Railways leaflet to show 'that it was a nice bright day' or the green on South Eastern railways 'stands for the countryside' left some students struggling to analyse the texts meaningfully, and as such comments were often superficial and undeveloped. When assessing students work, centres are only sometimes looking to analyse how well the response shows a comparative understanding of two texts, preferring instead to justify their assessment on the secondary aspects of the mark scheme, such as 'writers perspective', and 'understanding of presentational devices'; these descriptors were easily the most common annotations on scripts.

This generally resulted in generous marking as most students can make sound and sometimes thorough or perceptive comments on the perspectives of writers and their use of language and presentational devices, but not as many can do this as part of a consistently comparative discourse. Centre application of the marking criteria for the writing task was more accurate and it was clear that centres are more comfortable with the demands of the writing task which were familiar to teachers and students. Some centres did penalise students whose writing was well expressed and organised because they did not quite meet the focus of the task set. Centres need to be aware that task setting is vital and

that students should be primarily rewarded for the quality of the writing (which is the top bullet point in each band). The main problem with writing was where the writing task had not been completed on the coversheet or on the student work. The completion of accurate task titles is essential as it can impact on the student's achievement of purpose and audience. Some task titles were incorrect, e.g. 'website review' is not the task set. In one case a centre set their students the task to create a poster on travel or recycling. This resulted in colouring in pictures with very little text. The marks for writing showed consistency, although they could be a little generous given some pedestrian voice and essay-like organisation, particularly in the articles. Audience and sense of purpose are key features for this task.

Students who responded to the Festival article task generally showed knowledge of how to construct this type of text and were able to organise points accordingly. The best responses were where students attempted to persuade people to stay away from festivals by highlighting the negative aspects! However, if there is one criticism to be made for this task it was that many students did not really make it clear from whose viewpoint they were writing and consequently, 'the voice' was not always as convincing or clear as it could have been.

The writing tasks for the Travel theme seemed to attract more responses to the article rather than the online text for young people. The quality of responses seen was variable, however. In the best examples for the article about a travel issue from a specific point of view, students chose only one issue and presented points convincingly. Some examples included the withdrawal of bus passes from a pensioner's point of view, the decline of standards from a client who frequently used business class when travelling by aeroplane and the need to use public transport instead of cars from an environmentalist's perspective. Conversely, some responses to this task strayed from the primary focus of travel and an example of this was where most of a student's response was about the need to protect oneself from the sun by using the correct factor strength of sun cream and how to seek medical help (when travelling to hot countries).

The text for a website informing young people about some of the advantages and disadvantages of using public transport was also a popular choice. Many students chose to write about very real issues about having to use public

transport just to get to school, with arguments mainly to do with cost and timetables. In this task, students were more successful when they limited the advantages and disadvantages to focus upon to a few key points. In such cases ideas were developed much more than those students who chose to write 'a little about a lot'. Because this task seemed a more popular choice with lower ability students there were a couple of issues that this gave rise to, most notably that many responses were similar in both what points were made and how these points were structured and organised, and also with not addressing the audience of young people more directly, which in turn affected the assessment focus, 'sense of purpose and audience'. In terms of similar points made, this would suggest that the task was heavily teacher-led, and thus potentially inhibiting original ideas and students' notes were in the form of a paragraph plan. Assessment criteria for AO3iii were applied consistently in most cases, although as with previous series it did tend to vary across centres as to whether it was generous or harsh, particularly between Bands 2-4 where some were harshly marked while some were too generous, especially in relation to punctuation and sentences. For high achieving students in Bands 4 and 5, there was a tendency to award 6/7 marks where there was clearly not enough evidence of using punctuation devices with precision and sophistication, and for deliberate effect, whilst in some centres there was a clear reluctance to award 7 marks if only minor errors had occurred. Some centres did not accurately assess marks for spelling, giving marks for 'mostly accurate' spelling when there were frequent errors. Training for centres still needs to emphasise that comparison is the core part of the reading question and that this should underpin all other parts of the reading response. Comparison is a key skill in this section of the paper.

There remained some difficulties with assessment albeit with a smaller number of centres than in the previous summer series. Centres do need to check they are using the correct series for the date of entry. There were a minority that had completed last year's series but this was where some were resubmitting work which had already received marks without it being 'new work'. This was duly flagged by moderators. A minority submitted work for next year's series. There was evidence of internal moderation but centres still need further guidance on this as occasionally they inflated marks with no rationale, or did not internally moderate the whole required sample which devalues the process. In this series

there were again fewer cases of comments on scripts being written to students rather than to the moderator and folders and individual pieces being graded.

There were continued difficulties with administration of the moderation process despite reminders and checklists being shared extensively. A number of centres did not include the correct record sheets which have been used since November 2012 which required a signature to say the work is new work only. Some student notes taken into the controlled assessment did not follow awarding body guidelines and had full sentences, paragraphs and teacher structured notes sheets. Some centres did not follow procedures for students with special consideration and did not include JCQ coversheets or indicate whether the students had earned marks themselves for AO3 (iii). There was a lot of evidence that centres that had entered in previous had not followed the advice on administration or assessment given in their feedback reports. There was some problematic evidence this series of centres allowing students access to programmes that had pictures, cutting out of internet pages, word art etc.

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