

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2012

GCSE English (5EH03)
Creative English

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Part A – Report on application of standards by centres

Overall, most centres were applying standards for the various components of this unit accurately. They are to be congratulated for this, given that all aspects of it are new to schools.

The single greatest cause of errant marking in the first round of assessment for this unit in June 2012 was identified as being where centres had not internally standardised the work of their candidates. Although there were less problems of this nature in this second round, it is still the case that lack of internal standardising was often the cause of problems in accurate application of standards. It remains a vital part of the process which centres need to undertake. The process of internally standardising judgements has historically been the bulwark against centres' marks being adjusted. Attendance at regional standardising meetings by a representative of the English department, preferably the teacher with responsibility for GCSE/KS4, is linked to the internal standardising process. This has always been and remains the reason that Awarding Bodies strongly recommend that time is set aside to ensure robust internal standardising procedures are in place.

Speaking and Listening

Although all centres were using completely new criteria, they had generally applied these accurately when marking the performances observed during the moderation visits undertaken. In many centres, good use seemed to have been made of the Edexcel Standardising DVD, both to internally standardise teaching teams and also to indicate to students the standards required for the award of particular grades.

Where there was a discrepancy between the mark given by the centre and that of the moderator, there was no pattern of leniency or harshness. Moderators' reports show that across the three contexts, they were as often awarding higher marks than the centre as they were giving lower marks.

One area of concern in a minority of centres is the significant gap between the mark for the Speaking and Listening component of this unit compared to the mark for the Reading/Writing. In these instances, clutches of candidates had been awarded a Speaking and Listening mark which was as many as 15 or more marks higher than the Reading/Writing. The new criteria give the opportunity to ensure that teachers are "re-calibrating" their marking using the Band descriptors. Although it will always be the case that some candidates perform significantly better on Speaking and Listening, it is important that, where a centre finds it has awarded many candidates marks which are significantly higher for this part of the unit, they ensure that:

- robust internal standardising has taken place to guarantee that all teachers are applying accurate standards
- the teacher with responsibility for GCSE within the department is confident that there is sufficient detail in the notes being kept by teachers to justify the higher marks

A feature of future moderation visits will be a check by moderators whether the centre considers they have any candidates who are likely to get significantly higher marks for Speaking and Listening, and where practicable, these candidates should feature in the sample being jointly marked during the visit.

Poetry (Reading) and Creative Writing

When using the Assessment Criteria for Poetry (Reading) grid, teachers need to see the criteria statements as relating to the creation of meaning. Thus the use of “literary techniques to create effect” should be interpreted as concerning the poets’ choice of language in order to convey ideas, attitudes and feelings – i.e. how meaning is made. The second bullet point, how techniques contribute to the effects created, concerns the extent to which students are able to explicitly discuss language choices and poetic devices and thus links strongly to the fourth bullet point requiring clear, relevant textual reference to support response. It is these interconnected criteria which teachers need to apply in a holistic way when reaching a judgement about how well their students have understood the three poems in the Controlled Assessment response.

As with the last assessment round in June 2011, only a small number of centres entered this round of assessment. Of those, a significant number had entered candidates from the mid to lower end of the mark range, although some high Band 5 work did feature.

In general, teachers had applied the mark scheme accurately and few centres had their marks adjusted. Where there was a discrepancy between the centre mark and that of the moderator, this was as often a result of harsh marking by centres of candidates in Bands 1 and 2 as it was of being over-generous in the mid to higher Bands. There was some evidence of over-marking of responses which simply followed a PEE framework. This approach, championed by the National Literacy Strategy, is clearly a very useful preparation for textual study. However, by aged 16, perceptive and discriminating analysis will require a more fully conceptualised response than the rather mechanical PEE procedure. Overmarking was also evident on feature-spotting of techniques used without relating to meaning created within the poem. Occasionally centres appeared to reduce marks of their candidates because the interpretation offered was not shared by the marker. It is important to remember that, provided a valid case is made for interpreting a poem in a particular way, with defensible evidence drawn from the text and supported by appropriate textual references, the mark scheme is skills-based and rewards personal interpretation – provided it is not absurd!

Writing responses were generally accurately marked by centres across all Bands. There was greater variation in marking the AO3(iii) element. As many centres were harsh in their judgement of this element as those who marked leniently. There were examples of quite wide variations of approach being applied within the same centres, implying that greater attention to this aspect may need to be given at internal standardising. There is

inevitably a need to apply “best fit” approaches which balance the constituent bullet points of spelling, punctuation and sentence construction. Where candidates are using an ambitious and wide-ranging vocabulary, they may make more spelling errors than candidates who are restricted to a basic lexicon of common words. This should not prevent them from being awarded marks in the upper Bands if the responses are using punctuation in an interesting way and where there is a high degree of crafting and control in terms of sentence structure. Centres were generally more secure in applying the wider terms of the AO3(i) and (ii) criteria.

Part B – Report about coursework assignments

Speaking and Listening

Although the contexts have been given different names and the Band descriptors are new, the tasks which had previously been used for GCSE Speaking and Listening remained appropriate for use in the new Specification. Characters from *Of Mice and Men* continued to feature in the Creating and Sustaining Role activity. Candidates presented their ideas, interests and opinions on a range of topics to their classmates to show how they Communicate and Adapt their spoken language: groups of between two and seven pupils once again explored the established canon of topics from animal cruelty to school uniform to Interact and Respond. Although there is no “ideal” size for a group, evidence from visits indicates that once there are more than four candidates involved, the potential for one or more to find it difficult to join in is increased.

In general terms, it is useful to remind ourselves of research promoted many years ago by the National Oracy Project (NOP). Drawing on the work of the linguist M.A.K. Halliday, the NOP suggested that there were three aspects to consider when students talk to or with each other:

- Ideational aspects (what is said)
- Interpersonal aspects (how it’s said)
- Textual aspects (the form chosen to say it)

Each of these will be important every time we assess how effective students have been in a speaking and listening task. They may very well provide the basis for any field notes teachers keep to back up their judgments and keep a record for the purposes of moderation.

To take the third of those aspects first, whatever context they are working in, the words candidates choose to use and the way in which they structure them will be key to ensuring they achieve the highest mark of which they are capable. Just as assessments in writing require a wide and interesting vocabulary and a sophistication in the way in which a piece is structured, the same is true of the textual aspects of speaking and listening: in all three contexts the words they use and the way they deploy them will be a key consideration when awarding a mark.

The ideational aspect helps us to realise that, to achieve in Band 5 for Communicating and Adapting for example, candidates must be engaging with “complex and demanding subject matter.” In some cases during

moderation visits, very able students were constrained by being asked to give a presentation about “my hobby” or “work experience”. Whilst these could involve complex and challenging material, too often they did not; they were a general description of activities. Some excellent Band 5 work was observed where candidates had, for example, given detailed presentations about the impact of global warming, the moral responsibility of the media to present positive representations of ethnic minorities or whether violence is ever justified to promote an idea or cause.

A similar point could be made about Interacting and Responding. To achieve in Band 5, candidates must show “understanding of complex ideas through interrogating what is said”. It is thus necessary for the task the group is set to contain sufficiently challenging material for individuals to develop the ideational aspect of their performance.

Although interpersonal skills are important to ensure audience engagement in Communicating and Adapting and Listening and Responding, it is the third context, Creating and Sustaining a role, where there is considerable emphasis on this aspect. Candidates must use a range of skills to “become someone else in an ‘as if’ situation”. These skills will include:

- Voice: accent, pace, pitch, volume, inflection
- Facial expression
- Gesture and posture
- Using language suitable to the role
- Movement
- Idiosyncratic behaviour

It is also important to remember that this context requires candidates to both create and sustain a role. As an indication of someone who created a role but failed to sustain it, centres are reminded of Zac on the Standardising DVD. He is involved in a paired activity which lasts less than a minute and in which, although he is the main contributor, he speaks less than 100 words. Although he does use some of the skills of role play identified above to “become” Candy, because he speaks so little he does not develop what is said or show any range in the textual dimension. In short, he neither develops nor sustains his performance, which is why he was awarded a mark of 6 at the top of Band 2.

A final consideration for the Creating and Sustaining role assessment is the extent to which the task set genuinely requires candidates to “become someone else.” Some tasks used on moderation visits put the emphasis on task-focused roles which required little consideration of character. If students are asked to be a Youth Worker as part of a discussion on developing community facilities, there is the possibility that they present good ideas and use a wide vocabulary – but remain essentially themselves. Of course it would be possible to develop a character who is a youth worker and give them very different characteristics. However it was noticeable that, where candidates were taking a character from literature as their starting point, it was often easier for them to adopt a persona different from themselves.

Poetry (Reading) and Creative Writing

Once again, there was a lively range of responses from across the ability range produced in response to the Poetry Tasks. Clashes and Collisions and Relationships remained the most popular, but there were responses to poems in all four collections. In almost all cases candidates followed the rubric of the task and responded to three poems. In the very few cases where they did not, candidates had usually met the requirements of the criteria and so were awarded a mark by the centre which recognised positive achievement but made a reduction of a few marks to reflect the infringement. There are no hard and fast rules for how to calculate a mark reduction where only two poems have been considered. However, as broad guidance, for a candidate who is operating in Band 5 for the two poems written about, a mark reduction of 4, equivalent to nearly a whole Band, would be appropriate. However, for candidates in lower Bands, the same rubric infringement would appropriately only incur a 2 mark reduction, recognising the need to calibrate the penalty in relation to the marks awarded.

While a number of centres had encouraged their candidates to produce individual interpretations based on their own reading, this time there were more who seemed to have taught the same three poems to which candidates responded in a very similar way, often making the same points about identical textual references. Whilst it is always difficult to know how much support to offer candidates, especially at the lower end of the mark range, over-scaffolding runs the danger of capping performance, especially in the higher mark bands.

Where candidates had been taught the skills of analysis and given the confidence to apply these themselves, responses were often more sophisticated and more likely to access the upper end of the mark range.

Although there is no requirement to compare the three poems, there is also no restriction on this approach being adopted. Where it was, it often helped candidates to display the sophistication and discrimination necessary to achieve at the highest level.

There was much greater use of the option to respond multimodally in this round. Submissions included: digital video recordings of candidates speaking to camera while presenting a Powerpoint production; to-camera "lectures" about the three poems; podcasts which explored the requirements of the Task. An unusual approach which seemed to have helped candidates in the lower mark range to engage and achieve was the use of web-site production: candidates built their own sites exploring the poems and posted these on-line where they were viewed by the moderator. All of these approaches are legitimate provided they meet the requirement that they are wholly produced in the two hours available and that no assistance or intervention has been given by the teacher. It is important to ensure that multimodal productions are in a format likely to be accessible to moderators. Most notable, if it is a video production then this should be converted into a WMV file which can be played on almost all computers. The

bewildering array of tape formats mean that sending of one of them runs the risk of the moderator not having the necessary equipment to view it.

Creative Writing:

Overall, the strategy the Specification adopted for this component of giving a stimulating starting point for the ideas to be developed appears to have been positive in its impact on outcomes. Certainly a lively, varied and engaging range of responses resulted. In constructing a task which encouraged genuinely creative writing, the Specification Development team were mindful of Ofsted findings about the teaching of writing in schools: "Many of the lessons seen during the survey showed there was a clear need to reinvigorate the teaching of writing. Pupils were not motivated by the writing tasks they were given and saw no real purpose to them." (English at the Crossroads: Ofsted 2009)

If the outcomes from the first round of assessment are any indication, the creative element encouraged by this unit has begun to reverse that trend. Work had shifted away from over-emphasis on the catalogue of writing forms towards an emphasis on the generation of interesting ideas and the effective marshalling of them into engaging written outcomes.

The most successful work indicated an understanding on the part of the candidates (and by implication their teachers) that this task is about producing the best quality writing, not necessarily a large quantity of it. Although there is a suggested word limit of 1000, the best responses were often shorter. It was evident from marginal notes made by candidates that many centres had used two sessions of one hour to conduct this Controlled Assessment. In some cases candidates appeared to have been advised to spend a large part of the first session planning and rough drafting and the remaining time writing up a final version. These responses thus often showed many drafting changes, making the work look untidy in presentation, but of a higher quality in terms of crafted end product.

Part C – Administration

Many centres realised that the computerised system for generating samples for Poetry and Creative Writing does not always request the necessary top and bottom marked candidates. They provided these two as additional pieces in their sample, a very helpful action which sped up the moderation process. Centres who submitted the sample as requested by computer selection and subsequently had to be asked to send top or bottom or both are thanked for doing so punctually and with admirable forbearance.

Most centres did provide the correct paperwork to enable the process of moderation to proceed smoothly.

There has been a change in the wording of Ofqual's Code of Practice for the new specifications in relation to annotation. It is possible to interpret the new Code as indicating that no annotation is necessary on Controlled Assessment scripts. It is certainly the case that teachers will not have needed to add annotations for students as, unlike coursework, once the

responses are finished, they are handed in and cannot be changed. However, centres are reminded that, in the first instance, moderators are looking to confirm centre marks. Where annotation is included, and is addressed to the moderator to indicate how marks have been arrived at, it considerably helps the process of moderation.

The final words in this report concern not literacy but numeracy. In some centres' samples, arithmetic errors had been made when totalling up the various components. In the worst case this had very seriously disadvantaged the students, who had marks entered on the system which were well below the actual marks given for the work. It is in the best interests of the candidates to ensure that somewhere in the system, an arithmetic check is made to ensure hard earned marks are not squandered by administrative error.

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