

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE English (5EH03)
Creative Response

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General Overview

June 2013 saw a much larger entry than the previous two series, and once again, it was pleasing to note that students across the full range of ability coped well with the demands of the assessment criteria. The vast majority of students had clearly been well prepared by centres for this component and they engaged fully with the themes, tasks and texts provided.

Overall, most centres accurately applied standards for the various components of this Unit. Centres with internally standardised judgements remain significantly more consistent, making such internal standardisation a vital part of the process which centres need to undertake. Attendance at regional standardising meetings by a representative of the English department, preferably the teacher with responsibility for GCSE/KS4, or participation in online training provided by Edexcel is important in supporting 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.

The tasks for this series were the same as those for January 2013: for November 2013, new tasks should be used. These are available via the Edexcel website.

The unit is split into two elements: 'Speaking and Listening' and 'Reading and Writing' For Speaking and Listening students must complete three tasks:

- Communicating and Adapting Language,
- Interacting and Responding and
- Creating and Sustaining Roles.

For Reading and Writing, centres and students have a choice of four themes to answer on set by Edexcel:

- Relationships,
- Clashes and Collisions,
- Somewhere, Anywhere and
- Taking a Stand.

For **Poetry (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 *or* a digital media response which demonstrates that they have read and understood the poems *or* a multi-modal response combining the previous options. For the chosen theme students respond to two poems which they can select from the Edexcel Poetry Anthology and one poem which is set by Edexcel and changes every year. They prepare by making notes and planning their response to the task.

The reading response must show that students can:

- read the poems with insight and engagement
- interpret the writers' ideas and perspectives.

For **Creative Writing** students must complete one writing task on their chosen theme. For each theme, there is a choice of stimulus material which is designed to be used as a starting point. For three of the themes in this series, the stimulus material consists of a series of four photographs, and for one theme a

digital video clip is provided. 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:

- Write clearly, effectively and imaginatively in a chosen form to engage the reader
- Ensure spelling, punctuation and grammatical structures are accurate and appropriate for purpose and effect

Poetry (Reading)

As in the previous series, most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently. At the top of Band 5, there were an increasing number of students who produced detailed and original pieces of Poetry analysis. The application of marks around the band boundaries, specifically between Bands 3, 4 and 5, continues to cause the most difficulty. As stated previously, Band 3 responses are '**sound**' – they explain how the writer has used techniques to create effect, and support these points with specific examples. Band 4 responses are '**thorough**' – understanding is more developed and the response is sustained and consistent. For Band 5, students need to demonstrate '**perceptive**' understanding across all three poems with well selected and discriminating use of evidence. Some centres continue to identify 'sound' explanations as 'thorough', despite a lack of development and sustained support in the response. Meanwhile, some students worked through all three poems effectively but rigid adherence to the 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' structure prevented them from moving into the top of Band 4 and into Band 5: at this level, students need the freedom and confidence to move beyond PEE and PEEL in order to develop their own conceptualised response.

Unlike Unit 1, there is no requirement for comparison in this unit: a small number of centres appeared in their comments to be penalising students who had not compared the poems. Students need to demonstrate that they have engaged with the meaning of the poems and show an understanding of the poets' choices of language and technique. Once again, in a small number of centres, there was some evidence of 'over-preparation' where students tended to list the literary techniques employed, spotting examples of metaphors, alliteration and rhyme schemes without commenting on how or why these devices were used, or on the effects created. The best responses, however, showed students engaging maturely and carefully with a range of different poems. Some centres had noted the mention of 'personal comments' in the previous report and had encouraged this, with rather mixed results: clearly the study of poetry had not always fully engaged every student and they were not afraid of letting the moderator know this!

Creative Writing

The application of the marking criteria for the writing task was mainly accurate. As in the previous series, the assessment criteria for AO3 (i and ii) were applied consistently in most cases at Bands 1 and 2. Marks at the boundaries between Bands 3, 4 and 5 remain less secure. Band 3 specifies 'some evidence of crafting in the construction of sentences' and 'controlled paragraphing', whereas

Band 4 specifies 'variety in the construction of sentences' and 'secure organisation'. At times, responses with little control of sentence structure or paragraphing were placed in Band 4 because some of the vocabulary choices were apt and effective. In such cases, centres need to consider the balance between all of the bullet points in the mark scheme. Band 5 responses are typically 'convincing', 'sophisticated' and 'compelling'.

Assessment criteria for AO3 (iii) were applied consistently in most cases, although several centres seemed to be reluctant to award full marks: for 8 marks work does not have to be perfect! For 6 or 7 marks there should be clear evidence of using punctuation devices with precision and sophistication **for deliberate effect**. Assessment of spelling continues to be consistent and largely accurate, but assessment of punctuation remains an issue. Again, a useful reference point for punctuation is the accurate use of commas – it was still possible to find responses with extensive comma splicing being awarded marks in Band 4, where 'precision' and 'control' are specified. There was also evidence of teachers 'automatically' correcting errors as they marked but then awarding marks which were higher than their corrections suggested. Internal moderation processes should allow centres to avoid this.

Task Feedback

Poetry (Reading)

After a relatively small entry in January, there was more evidence here of patterns in centre and student choice of tasks. In the main, students had been well prepared by centres for this component and engaged well with the themes, tasks and texts. All topics were well received by students.

Responses were fairly evenly divided between 'Clashes and Collisions' 'Taking a Stand' and 'Relationships', with a very small minority of centres choosing 'Somewhere, Anywhere'. Once again, there was limited evidence of differentiation in the choice of poems from the Anthology, and in many centres all students responded to the same three poems. Choice of poems and even of clusters can be an excellent tool in allowing students of different abilities to produce their best work, and some centres used this to good effect, with different groups responding to different clusters. In some centres, students had studied the set poem and then made their own (guided?) choice of poems to write about, which worked well.

For Taking a Stand, 'Zero Hour', 'Those Bastards in Their Mansions' and 'No Problem' were most frequently used. For Clashes and Collisions and Relationships, the full range of poems was used, with work seen on every poem in these clusters. As in the January series, the set poems presented some challenges to students, particularly 'Family Affairs'. Several students also struggled with poems chosen by their centre: 'No Problem', 'The Class Game' and 'Parade's End' were often dealt with less successfully, and less able students struggled with the complexities of 'Belfast Confetti' and 'August 6, 1945'. However, most students were able to demonstrate that they had engaged with the meaning and language of the poems, and supported their points with textual references. Once again, it needs to be emphasised that the set poem is not intended to be 'unseen' at the point of assessment – students can prepare on this poem in exactly the same way as they do for the Anthology poems.

As in the previous series, there is still significant evidence that the use of literary terms can become a straitjacket rather than a supportive framework, leading to a tendency to 'feature spot'. While the use of 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' is helpful in allowing students to structure their writing, for students working towards Band 5, there is a need to show perceptive and discriminating analysis, and for this purpose a fully conceptualised response is necessary, rather than a more mechanical process. Some centres had attempted to help students by giving them a framework to structure their answer: in the worst cases, this led to very similar responses which did not allow students to demonstrate their own understanding. Irrelevant contextual detail was less common but still a concern as it is unnecessary and often takes up too much space in the response. Digital and multi-modal responses were used a little more frequently in this series, but centres still seem uncertain of what is required: further guidance will be available in the autumn term. Power Point responses dominated: some with accompanying commentary and some with attached video of the student presenting to an audience. There was little evidence of Band 4 and 5 Multi-Modal responses, and at their weakest the presentations provided were quotations with attached music and images, which did not allow students to demonstrate their understanding of how the poet had used language for effect. It is worth noting that the two hour task completion time applies to multi-modal presentations as well as to written submissions.

In summary, for this component students do best when they actively engage with the poems in order to 'make meaning' rather than trying to work through checklists of literary techniques and contextual background – some excellent responses were evident in this series.

Creative Writing

As ever for Creative Writing, students produced a wide range of thought-provoking responses, and moderators thoroughly enjoyed reading many of the pieces submitted. Students do not have to use the same theme for the Poetry and the Creative Writing task, and so here 'Clashes and Collisions' and 'Relationships' were the most popular choices. The best tasks allow students to clearly identify audience, purpose and narrative voice, and it is clear that centres have begun to address this explicitly in the planning and teaching process. Students also do better when they 'show' how characters are reacting and responding, rather than explicitly 'telling' the reader how they feel. 'Ghosts of War' elicited a range of very good responses, and there is some evidence that centres have taken note of previous reports and begun to encourage students to reduce the scope of the narrative, focusing on one or two incidents rather than on an entire life story. There was still some evidence of melodrama in responses to 'Looking Back', as well as some literal retellings of the source material. More able students experimented with flashbacks and time shifts, with a degree of success. 'Sunset' was also a popular theme and students used it as a literal and metaphorical idea to create a range of very different narratives. Whilst 'Taking a Stand' was less popular, some impressive work was seen: one centre, for example, linked the stimulus material to the evictions at Dale Farm and students wrote convincingly as a result. The stimulus material provided is intended to be just that: a stimulus for writing. Students do not need to provide a literal description of the photograph used in class. This was most evident in responses to 'Looking Back', which frequently

featured characters doing all of the things depicted in the video stimulus. One technique which worked well was the use of the title as a conclusion: 'This, then, is what I have become. I am the Ghost of War'.

Again, there is evidence that centres have considered previous reports and there were fewer over-long responses in this series. In fact, some had moved in the opposite direction and were very short: moderators reported seeing some responses of 250 words, which makes it difficult for students to fulfil the criteria! Where centres are explicitly teaching narrative techniques such as flashback and focusing on vocabulary and sentence structure for effect, students are employing these techniques effectively in their writing. The main weakness in responses is accuracy – particularly in sentence punctuation, where comma splicing is common, and in agreement of verb tenses. A greater focus on these elements would help students to achieve higher marks.

Administration

The main administrative issue in this series was the failure of a large number of centres to use the correct cover sheets. There are two main differences between these sheets and the previous version: the inclusion of a section in which centres are asked to explain any significant discrepancy between Speaking and Listening and Reading and Writing marks, and a declaration that students must sign to confirm that all of the work submitted is new work which has not been entered for a previous series. If these sheets were not used, centres were asked to supply them, which caused a number of difficulties as students had often begun their study leave.

It became apparent that a significant minority of centres, when asked to complete these sheets again, had no central record of students' individual marks, particularly for Speaking and Listening. It is strongly recommended that these marks are kept in centres, and many centres also take copies of cover sheets before submitting their moderation sample, which may be wise.

Where there are significant discrepancies between marks for Speaking and Listening and Reading and writing, centres need to consider carefully how such discrepancies have arisen. The comments entered in this section of the cover sheet should be specific to individual students rather than a 'blanket' statement about centre procedures for addressing Speaking and Listening.

The entry of marks onto Edexcel Online has now been split into two sections for this unit. Reading and Writing marks must be entered under 1A, whereas Speaking and Listening is entered under 1B. In some cases, centres inadvertently reversed these marks.

The vast majority of centres did include the top and bottom marked students with their sample, but it is worth noting that if they are not part of the randomly selected sample, centres are asked to ensure that they are included when work is sent to the Moderator.

Once again, it is worth considering how responses are annotated by teachers. 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. Centres will be aware that there are key words used in the Band descriptors. It is helpful if these are referenced in the annotation, but important that they are used accurately, and

that the words used in annotation match the centre mark awarded – e.g. ‘thorough explanation’ on a piece with a mark of 17 in Band 4 for Poetry.

As always, moderators appreciate well-organised folders which are easy to navigate. Treasury tags should be used to keep work in order, as individual work which is either sent as a series of loose leaf pages or contained inside plastic wallets can easily become separated during moderation. If work is submitted in electronic format – for example, for multi-modal pieces – then it is helpful if specialist software is not needed to access this. There is no requirement for centres to send students’ notes or copies of the stimulus material to the moderator.

Finally, there were, as ever, some centres where 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 students to ensure that somewhere in the system, an arithmetic check is made to ensure hard earned marks are not lost by administrative error.

The work seen during this series continues to show that centres and students are engaging well with the specification and the stimulus materials provided. Most of the problems reported by moderators were administrative in nature, and all reported seeing work of very high quality.

5EH03/1B: Speaking and Listening

Three tasks are completed: Communicating and Adapting; Interacting and Responding; Creating and Sustaining a Role.

These are at the lowest level of control: the centre sets and marks each piece. Their standards are reviewed triennially by a centre visit of moderator.

In general, reports from moderators indicate that centres provide tasks accessible to the full range of student ability.

The area which presents the greatest challenge to centres is ensuring that the level of complexity built into the task is sufficiently rigorous to meet the Band 5 criteria. It is still sometimes the case that for Communicating and Adapting, students are asked to give a talk about a hobby or present their interest in a certain topic. Unless the topic itself holds a sophistication or complexity, accessing the highest Band can prove difficult.

Many centres use the monologue as the Task used for Creating and Sustaining role. This is partly driven by the exemplification of this approach on Edexcel Standardising DVDs. There has been some exceptionally good produced at the highest level. There is also a sense that, even for students in the lower mark bands, it offers a chance to perform to their full potential. Where there are a number of students involved in a role play scenario, an issue has been ensuring that each student has enough time to show a *sustained* role.

Interacting and responding is most commonly completed in group of three or four – an appropriate size for this task. Very occasionally, moderators have seen groups of 7 or 8 students and almost always this has meant that some are disadvantaged by not being able to participate.

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