

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

GCSE English and English Language
(5EH01)

English Today

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General Overview

Centres and candidates have a choice of two themes to answer on set by Edexcel. For 2013-2014 these are 'Children's Literature' and 'Online Social Networking' and this was the second and final series using these themes.

For **Reading** candidates 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 candidates 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 candidates 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** candidates 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 candidates 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 eighth series of Unit 1 and all candidates coped well with the demands of the assessment. The majority of candidates had been well prepared by centres for this component and engaged well with the given tasks and texts. Both topics were well received by candidates, being accessible and within their experience and these provided candidates with opinions, experience and knowledge which helped in the writing tasks.

Candidates 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 candidates choose their tasks and texts individually. Such personalisation is welcomed and encouraged. Both themes were evident although Online Social Networking was significantly more popular this series. Within this, the texts of the Mail Online (often compared with Kansas State Collegian) compared with the Childline webpage or Childnet leaflet were the usual choices. Less seen this series was the Breast Cancer Awareness webpage. Many centres had clearly thought through their choices of texts, often matching these appropriately to the abilities of their students, and which allowed them to make meaningful comparisons between the two texts regarding writers' perspectives and ideas, language and presentation. A few candidates chose the 'Where's Klaus' video to comment on and this either produced extremes in quality of responses, with some excellent quality comments but in some places little analysis of it as a moving image text. In the Children's Literature theme, the most popular choices were the Mail Online text about the 'doting dad' Scott Mcintyre, the Roald Dahl webpage and the interview with Anthony Browne, all of which were compared through various combinations, although the Roald Dahl webpage and Anthony Browne interview were the most favoured to compare. The text choices for this theme were varied: all texts were used (a small handful of able candidates in one centre choosing the conservation text and producing good responses) Comparisons tended to be Mail/ Quick reads and Dahl/Browne (candidates in two centres were confused about the purpose of the texts, most candidates suggesting Browne was less well known therefore was promoting himself and trying to sell his books). It was pleasing to see the progression into a full range of texts being analysed and compared as this has developed over the years.

For writing all four tasks were chosen. There were some examples of very effective responses sharply focussed on purpose, audience and form. In Online Social Networking the best examples chose an issue which they knew a lot about and which appeared to be of importance to them. The least successful (other than those which wrote to inform/advise/no discernible

reason) tried to cover all the ideas they had researched and/or showed no evidence of overall text structure. Some produced a physical leaflet and spent more time in presentation than writing, often with lots of bullets making it difficult to achieve assessment bullets 1, 3 and 4. The podcasts seemed to present most problems as far as focusing on task is concerned with candidates producing interviews with actors who've starred in film adaptations, or quizzes, twitter messages etc. though some were very engaging and believable. Some candidates (usually Band 3) seemed to think that they had to write as much as possible and responses became repetitive and lacking in accuracy. Shorter, well edited pieces would have been appreciated. Again the most enjoyable and effective pieces were those where candidates wrote about what interested them rather than where they all included the same points with differing degrees of success.

In terms of candidate performance and assessment of this component, centres seem to have become more focused on the comparative aspect of this task as evidenced by the increasing integration of comparing language, presentation and ideas within the main body of the text. Stubbornly though, the issue of treating texts separately and then adding a concluding tag-on paragraph that usually focuses on which text is preferred or contains a brief list of similarities, still remains. At best, these comparisons can only be marked for 'some comparisons' within Band 2 but more usually 'limited comparisons' from Band 1, and as the comparative element determines the band in which the response should be placed, there are many lost (and unnecessarily so) opportunities for achieving higher marks from other bands. As is to be expected from large entries, the quality of comparison does vary. As last series very few candidates failed to compare. In many centres comparison was obviously the focus of the teaching, but still in too many cases there were spurious comparisons, or candidates making a wide variety of comments about e.g. all elements of language or presentation before making a comparison. In some centres the structure of the responses across the sample got in the way of focussed comparisons either by commenting about too many techniques before comparing or writing about one text first then comparing whilst commenting on the second text.

The vast majority of candidates were most confident when writing about writers' ideas/perceptions. Again detailed language analysis was generally lacking. However, at the higher end there were very few discriminating comparisons seen in this series even though there was a sizeable proportion marked as such. Often where discriminating comparisons are seen is when the candidate links what is being compared such as language or presentation to writers' viewpoints and effects on audience, although a cautionary note must be added to this since this is not always the case! In some instances, where the candidate has really engaged with the two texts the discriminating comparisons stem from original thought and interpretation and not necessarily from what has been taught. An example of this is where a candidate has compared The Mail Online article to The Kansas State Collegian stating:

'...The article is entitled 'Pupils do worse in exams study shows' appeals to their demographic – mostly adults with family-based views and specifically to the parental instinct of wanting their children to do well. Text 2 is also an article in an online version of a university newspaper, the KSC with the title '10 reasons social networking benefits students' similarly attracts their demographic – but this time 18-25 year old American college students. The writer plays on this particular demographic's desire to have more, trying to convince them of these 'benefits'. The purpose is to persuade them to join a social network, but also just to entertain the reader. Because of this we can expect this article to be more light-hearted than Text 1 which is alarmist and serious'.

A further example can be found using the 'Where's Klaus' video to the Mail Online where the candidate states:

'The DM uses hyperbole to worry parents '...the difference between getting an A or a B grade...' using the fears of the reader, especially effective in April when the article was published – and just before exams. Similarly, the 'Where's Klaus? Advertisement also uses hyperbole to worry parents but CEOP does it in a different way. The mother's casual language contrasts with the visitors, '...We'll go up and try some kinky stuff...' which builds on the character image of being inappropriate company. Both texts look at the dangers of the internet but they communicate that in different ways. Both

targeting parents, but with the DM article presenting itself as rational and factual, whilst WK relies on the viewers' emotions. It could be argued that CEOP's text is more persuasive because it builds (up) the drama then tells the viewer what to do while closer reading of the DM reveals bias with there being no arguments to support the opposing view and nowhere to go for help'.

The marking of this component, as in previous series, tended to be generous around the top of Band 3 and throughout the full range of Band 4. Where marks from the middle to the top of Band 4 are awarded, centres are reminded to look for specific comparisons that show detailed analysis, with the quality of analysis determining the actual mark. Where candidates were awarded over-valued marks within this Band it was often because some comparisons were specific (which indicates a low Band 4 at best) but which did not include any meaningful level of detailed analysis of the texts being compared. Some candidates spent too long on the qualities of websites and the adverts to the detriment of the main text. Again little evidence of centre's having taught the skills and then let candidates choose.

There was evidence in quite a few centres of close teaching to the exclusion of personal ideas. One moderator commented 'As I've also commented before, there were obviously some very able candidates who seemed almost hobbled by regurgitating what teacher said. In a few centres candidates seemed to have been almost misled by the teaching e.g 'The Mail Online text is SNS has black writing on a white background to show coldness/purity/honesty'. Again some centres (one in particular) did not see the texts as media texts, but pieces of writing to be critiqued e.g. comments on misspelling, perceived grammatical errors showing sloppy editing – comments not related to the purposes of the texts. There was far less analysis of images this time – quite often omitted altogether or a brief mention. Comments on use of colour varied from perceptive to fairly tenuous, e.g. 'green represents vegetables so it's healthy'. In some centres candidates had been given technical vocabulary, but were not really comfortable with it so either used it incorrectly (e.g. 'never' as a modal

verb) or wrote it without any examples or exemplification e.g. ' A lexical field gives the reader a clear understanding of the writers' views', 'epistemic modality reinforced with deontic modality', 'To move on the text the author uses asyndetic lists' When scripts were over marked in reading it was usually (not exclusively) because of over-valuing the degree of comparison. Many summative comments didn't even refer to comparison. This was frustrating for moderators given the attention given to quality of comparison in E9 reports and reports from the PM to centres.

From the theme of Online Social Networking both tasks were completed fairly evenly. Unsurprisingly, many responses to the article and leaflet dealt with the negative issues of cyberbullying, grooming and time for school work being affected. Such responses showed good levels of research by including relevant and recent case studies of people who have been affected by such issues.

However, the most notable and successful responses to the article were where candidates focused on a singular issue rather than try to do too much with a range of related topics. An excellent high-quality example that was worthy of publication in any national and international forum, was where a female candidate explored the very real issue of pressures faced by girls who used Facebook and Instagram to participate in their own objectification of themselves as someone desirable and sexually attractive. The response was 'punchy' in its tone and content and served as a salutary lesson to all readers about the increasing normalisation of self-aggrandisement and where the writer recognised that it seemed *'only natural that flaunting one's sexuality online is the way to gain approval'*.

The response to the leaflet was a popular choice for some low-ability candidates who were able to gain valuable marks for overall structure and organisation through the use of sub-headings and bullet points that were relevant to this form. However, in some cases this had a detrimental effect on demonstrating their ability to generate and develop points in a sustained and meaningful way that satisfied the requirements of audience and purpose. In some cases while the bullet points began with the imperative form of a sentence, which by its nature can be regarded as persuasive, often these were nothing more than sound bites that were not followed up

with relevant information that would have fully persuaded the audience about social networking. In many cases these were not written from a specific point of view which tended to be overlooked and so consequently they did not fulfil the whole criteria of the task. In such cases a convincing 'voice' was lacking and this was a missed opportunity to really get to grips with the persuasive element.

In the Children's Literature theme, there was again, an even split between the script for a podcast aimed at young people in which you review your favourite children's literature and a leaflet for parents in which you persuade them about Children's Literature from a specific point of view. As in previous series, the best candidates responding to the podcast task were fully focused on the review aspect of the task by using a very sound 'voice' that was clearly aimed at listeners. Some candidates chose to interview a celebrity about his or her favourite book (possibly influenced by some of the reading texts) that was relevant as long as they didn't stray from the purpose by including comments and conversations about forthcoming tours and recently released films (as seen in some responses)!

The response to the leaflet was also a popular choice. Here, the specific point of view came through within the content much more than the task for Online Social Networking. Some responses were written from a teenager's point of view or that of an educationalist – with most providing a balanced approach between the negative and positive aspects of reading. The best responses were seen where candidates structured the benefits of Children's Literature into specific ages such as 'How to engage your child with books from 0-5 years' that lead to other incremental age ranges through to adulthood. In a minority of cases, candidates were slightly unfocused when only referring to how school work was affected if children didn't read.

Overall, candidates were engaged with the tasks and showed evidence of their research through the content and tone adopted. Structure and organisation was largely secure and the use of connectives and discourse markers aided cohesion within and between paragraphs. Sometimes openings and conclusions were less sharp than expected. Sentences such as '*In my article I am going to be writing about....*' and '*Therefore my conclusion to this is....*' are not a feature of articles that one would normally

see in any published version, and such phrases added very little to the overall responses. The marking of A03 (iii) was largely accurate although many centres are still reluctant to award full marks from Band 5 – possibly because there is an expectation that it should be flawless – which is not the case.

There remained some difficulties with assessment, where assessment objectives were not met. 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 candidates rather than to the moderator and folders and individual pieces being graded. There was a lot of evidence that centres had marked accurately but then given numerical marks to push the candidates into what were grade boundaries for F, C and A from June and November 2013. There was a lot of clustering at these marks. Suspected malpractice was again an issue in this series, one experiences Team Leader commented:

'Centres that are not following the guidelines for the setting of the controlled assessment and the conditions within which they are taken are (alarmingly) on the rise. This is indicated through a number of centres who are not disabling internet access when candidates are taking the controlled assessment. This was particularly prevalent in the writing section where candidates responded to the leaflet task in the Online Social Networking theme. Images and familiar icons and logos from Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites are indeed often found in published leaflets, and therefore it is understandable that candidates would want to make their responses look as authentic as the real thing. However, for the purposes of this task, candidates need to be made more aware that they are not assessed on their presentation skills – only the quality of writing and how they respond to purpose and audience. Furthermore, in some cases, candidates had actually cut out images and logos and glued these on to their responses! Given that the length of time allowed for the writing task is two hours, it would appear that the candidates from centres who are not disabling internet access, are spending a good proportion of this time in the

overall presentation of the piece which has the potential to impact on the quality of writing. One centre had even laminated some leaflets which suggested that they had been used for school display purposes, and which also presupposes that candidates had had access to their work after the assessment had taken place, which again, is not allowed. Although in the minority, some candidates who had had access to the internet, copied phrases, sentences and sometimes whole paragraphs from other sources that was a clear infringement of the rules, and which (worryingly) had not been detected by the centre assessors. Another issue related to task-tasking is that of notes. Increasingly, notes that were included with the actual responses showed paragraph plans (some with starting sentences that were more akin to a writing frame), and full sentences. Notes with this much level of detail is not allowed and should be limited to one side of A4 using bullets and short phrases, relevant to the task. Centres are reminded that in order to ensure that the guidelines are adhered to, and that staff are clear of what is and is not permissible, the specification and the PEARSON EDEXCEL English webpage should be regularly consulted. There are also relevant regional training sessions held throughout the year to assist centres with their controlled assessment arrangements.'

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 candidate 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 candidates with special consideration and did not include JCQ coversheets or indicate whether the candidates had earned marks themselves for AO3 (iii). There was again 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.

