

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

GCSE

GCSE Urdu (5UR04)

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Publications Code UG024791

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Unit 4: Writing

General

This is the first examination for the New Specification Controlled Assessment Writing - Unit 5UR04. It is a non-tiered unit and the variety, quality of language and length of submitted tasks determine the final mark. The teaching of the new specification started in September 2009, while the deadline for the first submission of the written scripts was 15 May 2010. A few centres did submit the work this series, although looking at the overall standard of the scripts it may be concluded that the centres opted to enter the candidates without considering the need to read and fulfil its requirements, hence the students and teachers both needing some more time to familiarise themselves with the new specification.

The general standard of performance was rather inadequate. Most of the scripts sent for examining were very poor, both in terms of quality of performance and teachers' guidance for the candidates. Some centres produced very short pieces of work of an unsatisfactory standard and with no proper stimulus material. On occasion, material submitted for assessment did not meet the requirements of the specification. This resulted in an overall standard of performance being quite disappointing. It appeared that many centres were not familiar with the rules governing the new controlled assessment task taking, or failed to observe them.

Tasks

The candidates worked on diverse tasks. While the work produced by some candidates was imaginative and appropriate, others needed more attention in order to be awarded higher grades. Sports and Leisure was the most popular topic among the candidates. They picked a variety of themes such as sports facilities in schools and a summer camp. The following presents a full break-down of the topics covered by the candidates:

Sports & Leisure	Business, Work & Employment	Travel & Tourism	Media & Culture	Centre-devised option
34%	15%	26%	15%	6%

Most of the above tasks allow candidates to use a wide range of tenses, structures and vocabulary and also allow them the opportunity to demonstrate the subject knowledge, knowledge and application of language and ability of expressing their own views on the stated subject. There are only isolated examples where the candidates were able to develop these tasks into a good piece of work. This resulted in very few candidates fulfilling the criteria for high marks.

Centre-devised tasks

For the purpose of encouraging personalised learning the teachers were asked to adapt the tasks or even create their own tasks in order for them to take on a different nature. In this regard, in the Instructions for the Conduct of Examination (ICE) the teachers were advised to provide 'a simple title; a title in English is acceptable. However, the most appropriate stimulus is one that is broken down into bullet points'.

Despite this suggestion, where the centres provided their own tasks, no stimulus was provided to the candidates, and it was apparent that such students could have performed better in the presence of a suitable stimulus. Not knowing what they were expected to write in their written assessments definitely resulted in achieving lower marks. On the contrary, the candidates performed comparatively better when they worked on the stimuli provided by the Edexcel.

There was a lack of information about controlled conditions. It was apparent that a number of centres were not familiar with the rules governing controlled assessment. Failure to comply with the rules can be prejudicial towards the candidates and it appears from the work submitted that many centres failed to observe the rules during the task taking. For example, one of the requirements for the submission of the tasks by the centres as stated in the Qualification Contents page of the New Specification (p.22) is that the teachers 'must not provide any help or give specific feedback to students on their preparatory work'. Despite the guideline, some centres sent the work that was marked very distinctly (in red pen) by the teachers. Teachers must bear in mind that this type of error may not be in the best interest of their candidates and consequently jeopardise their overall achievement.

Authentication sheet

The Specification is very clear about the non-submission of the authentication sheet and the consequences for the missing sheets are stated very distinctly as the overall marks being 'adjusted to zero' (p.33). This year, in some cases, the authentication sheets were not duly signed by the teachers. For the 2011 examination series the teachers must bear in mind that it is the responsibility of the centres to ensure that the work submitted by their candidates is original and is completed complying with the guidelines provided for task taking under controlled conditions duly signed by the teacher. Teachers are also reminded that omissions like this will diminish the overall grades of a candidate.

Administration

- One copy of the stimuli and students' brief notes must accompany all submissions
- In case the teacher decides for opting for a centre-devised task, the following must be kept in mind for achieving better results:
 1. Clear and concise task requirements
 2. Maximum 70 words with additional English language explanation of context
 3. Prompts and cues may be set either in English or Urdu.
- Word count: Students aiming for Grade C or above are required to demonstrate more extended-writing skills by producing over 200 words in each task. However, the absence of a word count on the script shows that in most cases the students were not aware of the importance of reaching the minimum targets (200 words limit) for the higher level work. In some cases, the students finished at 180 words. From looking at the quality of their work, it was obvious that they would have been capable of reaching the target requirement by elaborating their answers had they been more aware of the minimum requirements of Higher Level work.
- Candidates wrote on both sides of very poor quality paper which made the second side of the sheet illegible in some instances, resulting in lower grades. Also, no margin was left therefore presentation was very poor.

Poor presentation of the work was another major issue that came to light. Most of the centres showed a very casual approach while submitting work for examinations. In some cases the work was completed on a paper ripped off a notebook; even $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ sized pieces of A4 sized paper were submitted without stapling the sheets together which reflected the non-professional attitude regarding the submission of work. The teachers are advised to provide the students with appropriate sheets of paper for task taking under the controlled assessment.

Grade Boundaries

Raw Mark boundaries

Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
60	52	45	38	31	25	20	15	10

Uniform Mark Scale boundaries

Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
90	81	72	63	54	45	36	27	18

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