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Examiner's Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Language (WEN03)
Unit 3: Crafting Language (Writing)

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Introduction

The source booklet consisted of four texts relating to The Beatles, taken from a range of sources, and students clearly engaged with the task of producing a webpage about the history of the band. Question 1 prompted a wide variety of valid approaches to the task and a number of enjoyable pieces of writing that demonstrated creativity and nuanced understanding of audience, purpose and context. There were very few responses that did not manage to produce a convincing webpage at all, even if those at the lower levels lacked the liveliness and subtle reworking of the material found at the higher levels.

The second task required the students to produce an analytical commentary on the text produced in Section A. This commentary should explore the intended audience, purpose and context of the webpage and how this influenced the students' choice of register, tone and language techniques, as well as discussing structure, organisation and how the original sources were adapted to create a new text.

Many students found Section B more of a challenge than Section A and it appeared that they had spent more time on the writing task than the commentary, despite the higher marks available in Section B.

Overall, students produced work which was engaging and perceptive, showing how well centres had prepared them for the exam and demonstrating the ability of those students to write both creatively and analytically.

Section A

At all levels, students showed the ability to write with engagement and flair, but where they showed a more subtle understanding of audience, purpose and context, achievement was much higher. This is an area where centres can continue to work on their students' understanding. Where students had identified a more specific audience, purpose and context for their webpage and then adapted their language in an appropriate way, they were able to transform the material in the source texts convincingly. At the lower levels, there was little change in register and tone in the new text from those of the source material, which tended to result in less realistic webpages and a less enjoyable writing style.

Similarly, careful selection of material from the source texts and assimilation into a well-structured original piece of writing resulted in more successful responses. The best responses subtly combined well-chosen information and details from the source texts with original, creative writing. These students clearly planned their responses and had considered their structure and organisation carefully as a key element of the new text. Less successful students were more likely to follow the same order and structure of the four source texts, trying to include all of the original information in the original order.

In this respect, significant direct "lifting" from the source texts, even with some attempt to reframe or paraphrase the material, is not a productive approach to this question. Inevitably, the writing can lack originality and flair and the responses can be quite long, as students struggle to be selective with the

information, instead reworking each text in turn. This can also have an effect on the level of achievement in the commentary as the students inevitably run out of time.

This response, with its confident and lively voice along with judicious inclusion of details from the source texts, was awarded a mark in the top level. This extract is taken from the opening of the response:

Genre	Audience	Purpose	Context
Website article	21st century Teenagers with interest in old music	Inform & entertain	Music critic (amateur)

The Beatles: ~~the~~ Music Extraordinaire

The Beatles had, undoubtedly, the most important exponents of what makes ~~super~~ legends: unbreakable bromance, timeless looks of band members with timeless good looks and exceptional music flair. But who exactly were they and are they still widely talked about? Ah well, sit down comfortably, buckle your seatbelts, and prepare to go down memory lane by means of a few short paragraphs!

This student adopts an engaging voice from the very beginning, using techniques such as imagery, direct address to the audience and rhetorical questions. There is a clear understanding of the stated audience of "21st century teenagers with an interest in old music" and the register and tone seem appropriate for the stated context; purpose could have been considered in some more specific detail in the grid.

The response continues in the next extract:

The Band's Origins: explained & summarised

Aside from the fact that The Beatles are continuously the subject of a smorgasbord of internet memes, and ~~they~~ also ~~the~~ have a ever-lasting cult following by music-maniacs all over the globe, ~~they~~ what else do they have in common with modern-day pop groups? Avant-garde, experimental music style? Check! Questionable and unconventional fashion sense? Check! ~~Manufactured~~

Conventions of webpages such as subheadings are used to good effect in this response and the student maintains a lively, entertaining tone throughout. By comparing the band with current pop groups and including references to modern media, the student shows clear understanding of audience and genre.

This final extract is from the next section of the response, where the student includes a brief description of the band's early history using details from Text A of the source material. The information from the source material is combined with original, creative writing to good effect. Including this section after an entertaining introduction to hook the reader has created an effective structure and shows careful planning.

~~It's~~ Everything started off with one lone rebel without a cause ~~too~~, seeking to consolidate himself as a 'Somebody' among the masses of 'Nobodies'. And that is John Lennon. He formed a band named 'The Quarrymen' together with his high school friends, two of which would later on become a permanent member of The Beatles. Then again, it wasn't until 1960 that the band's journey became definitive on the road towards ~~#fame~~ and fortune; incidentally, the band rebranded itself from 'The Silver Beatles' to just 'The Beatles'.

Section B

Where students had allowed sufficient time to produce a detailed commentary and had covered a range of features from their own writing, perceptive and accurate analytical commentaries were produced; if they prioritise planning and writing for Section B students are more likely to cover a range of different methods and effects within the commentary. For a number of students, writing over-long responses for Section A limited the time available to produce a meaningful response for Section B.

Most students were able to make comments on audience, purpose and context and link these to register and tone, even if the links to specific effects and choices are not always fully realised. At the lower levels, exemplification was more limited and students tended to make generalised comments without specific reference to their writing. The best commentaries contained consistent use of evidence in the form of examples from the webpage to illustrate every point and made consistent links between context, audience and purpose and the choices they made within their own writing.

Students at the higher levels were also able to describe the evidence they provided using relevant terminology. Similarly, the range and relevance of technical methods and terminology explored were often a discriminator between the lower and higher levels. "Feature spotting" occurred more frequently in lower level responses, particularly where linguistic understanding was limited to the labelling of word classes with little further explanation of how these words created meaning. For the commentary, students need a toolkit of a range of terminology and techniques to discuss and this is an area where centres can continue to develop their students' knowledge.

The following response was rewarded for its clear, controlled analysis, but fell short of the detailed evaluative quality required for a top mark.

The field is the story of the Beatles, arguably the most popular band in the world. Hence the article though subjective, had to contain sufficient factual information to maintain a level of objectivity.

There is a certain degree of informality to how the article is written. This is done with the audience in mind. At some points, the article uses rhetorical questions to engage the reader. For instance, it asks the readers "is any break-up ever pretty really? The aim of doing this isn't to get the readers to answer (perhaps in the comment section). It does this to give the reader cause to continue on.

The student makes an interesting relevant point about the need to balance information and subjective comment but this is undeveloped; it would have been useful to have included some examples from their webpage here along with some evaluative discussion to show how this balance was achieved. There is a clear attempt to link register to audience in the next paragraph and the example given to illustrate the point is well chosen. However, the student does not fully explain the effect of using rhetorical questions and the comment of "it does this to give the reader cause to continue on" is quite vague and generalised. The brief mention in parenthesis of writing in the comment section on a website is an interesting point that could have been developed further. At this stage in the commentary, the student does not provide any further examples or evidence of

informality in their webpage and moves on to a different topic. It would have been helpful to have explored register in more detail, as well as the method of direct address to the audience adopted through rhetorical questions and various other techniques.

This next extract is taken from further on in the student's commentary:

Throughout the article, the author repeatedly made use of sentence lengtheners (-), favouring these over short sentences.
Also there is a frequent use of the first person singular (I), this is done in an example of authorial intervention. This facts are presented, yet the author seeks the reader's agreement (your agreement).

While writing and reshaping the article, particular attention was not only paid to grammar but also to sentence structure. The paragraphs begin and end abruptly; even though the actual sentences were lengthy and quite explanatory.

At this point in the commentary, the student is beginning to "feature spot" with limited analysis or evaluation. The first two points about the structure and length of sentences followed by the use of the first person singular are significant points for discussion that are passed over very briefly. The student should have chosen some examples from their writing and explored how these techniques would affect their chosen audience or achieve their chosen purpose. There is some attempt to do so with "the author seeks the reader's agreement" but this is underdeveloped. There is a return to discussion of sentence structure in the next paragraph, which may indicate a lack of planning for this commentary as it is not linked to the earlier comments. Again, a relevant point is being made here but it lacks detailed exemplification or a specific link to effect and purpose. As this extract is from close to the end of the commentary it is possible that the student was limited for time and has rushed to include these points.

It was noted that a number of students wrote their commentaries in an objective third person voice, sometimes referring to "the author" as in the extract above. This technique appeared to be productive for some students who may have felt

uncomfortable writing about their own creative work in the first person. It was equally acceptable for the students to take a more personal approach to the task, using first person and including comments such as "I decided to" or "I wanted to".

Paper Summary

The students were able to take inspiration from the source materials, producing creative work at all levels. The task was accessible for all and they were able to use their own knowledge of the website genre and of music and media, even if they knew little other information about The Beatles. Many students had clearly enjoyed the topic and showed confidence when writing for a website. Where students managed their time well, detailed commentaries were produced in Section B to explore the writing process and analyse the language choices made. Centres can continue to help their students by developing a more comprehensive range of technical methods and terminology with which to comment on their own writing. Similarly, encouraging students to make consistent links with audience, purpose and context will enable them to make more insightful comments about the choices they have made in their writing.

Based on their performance on this paper, students are offered the following advice:

Section A

- Decide on a specific audience, purpose and context for your writing and try to adopt an appropriate register, tone and language techniques.
- Be selective with the material you use from the source texts, combining it with your own original writing.
- Plan your response, paying close attention to structure and organisation; you do not have to follow the same structure as the source material.
- Think about your commentary when planning your response to Section A, noting down any decisions you have made or techniques you have used that you could explore in Section B.
- Time your response and make sure you leave enough time for Section B.

Section B

- Develop a flexible "toolkit" of frameworks that can be applied to a variety of texts and techniques, along with a range of linguistic terminology, rather than relying on prescriptive mnemonics or lists of features, as this can lead to "feature spotting".
- Always supports your points with examples from your writing.
- Link technical features to audience, purpose and context; explain why the language used was appropriate.

