

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)

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4357/01 Reading and Writing

General Comments

This was the third series of this new examination and there was much evidence to show that both teachers and candidates are becoming more familiar with the tasks and the requirements of the test. Generally candidates performed well and dealt with the requirements of each task effectively. However, a general comment relevant to all the tasks in this paper is that candidates should read the instructions and any other supporting information very carefully before starting work on any of the tasks. The instructions give essential information and direct the candidates to the response that is expected of them and ignoring this information can lead to responses that do not meet the requirements of the tasks and the examination itself.

Part 1

This is a very straight forward task and candidates are familiar with the requirements as they see it frequently in their coursebooks. In this case, candidates were looking at specific detail and needed to match the statements to the sections of the text. They should bear in mind that in all cases information will have been paraphrased or summarised and that they should consider the whole sentence rather than looking for words which can be matched to the main text.

Candidates should also follow instructions given for the completion of this task. The purpose of these instructions is to allow candidates to clearly identify the response they have selected. Where this is not clear, it is impossible for examiners to allocate marks.

Part 2

The text here was taken from a newspaper and was adapted slightly to fit in with the requirements of the task. Candidates generally dealt with the multiple matching questions successfully. However the comments above in Part 1, regarding instructions for these types of questions also applies here. Q11 and Q12 asked for three answers to be selected. Where candidates selected more than three answers, they were penalised.

In Q15 to Q21, candidates were asked to complete the sentences with information taken from the text. It is essential to bear in mind that in sentence completion tasks such as this, the response provided must be grammatically accurate and spelt correctly. The information should also fit in with the whole message of the sentence and represent information given in the text. Sentences are paraphrased and do not necessarily contain words or phrases which have been copied from the text. Word spotting is not a good way to complete this task. Candidates should consider the information in the text and the sentences carefully and complete them with words or phrases taken from the text.

Candidates are not expected to transform the information from the text grammatically to make it fit the structure of the sentences. If a candidate feels they need to transform the selected word or phrase then it is likely they have misunderstood the text or the task. Candidates should follow the instructions on word limit given in the task. If candidates select an answer which exceeds the word limit, it is most likely they have misunderstood the text or the task.

Part 3

In Q22 to Q32, candidates were again expected to complete the sentences with information taken from the text. In tasks like this, the sentences will target key information, and in many cases candidates were able to identify what this was. Incorrect answers were often due to carelessness and not reading the sentences carefully enough in order to select the relevant words or phrases to complete them. Candidates are not expected to transform the information from the text grammatically. However they must make sure that the answer they give applies to the sentence and reflects the information in the text accurately.

In Q33 to Q36, candidates had to select the relevant information from the box and write the correct letter in the space provided. Those who did not read the instructions and wrote the whole phrase out again, were given the mark where their answer was correct. However it is imperative that they follow instructions carefully.

Part 4

It was pleasing to see a number of good responses as candidates become more familiar with this type of task. Candidates are expected to provide evidence of writing with a neutral to formal register and tone. There were several interpretations of what a report would look like. Where tone and register were consistently accurate candidates were not penalised. However, they must keep in mind that this task does NOT ask for a letter and they should keep away from any writing that reflects the conventions of letter writing. They should also make sure that they have addressed ALL the requirements of the task, including information given regarding the scenario and the bullet points.

Part 5

This is a task that candidates are very familiar with and therefore this task was performed well. Responses were often imaginative and interesting but candidates must try to remain reasonable and to follow the scenario set as closely as possible.

In this task, candidates are not expected to write addresses (unless this has been specifically mentioned in the task), therefore they should not lose time writing out an address. The key point here is communication and examiners want to see a letter that communicates the requirements of the task reasonably within the set scenario.

Part 6

This was the section which saw the most improvement in candidate performance. Most candidates addressed this task and did so successfully. The key here is to read the instructions carefully and identify the information that they need to select from the text. Any irrelevant information is penalised and often leads to candidates writing longer texts or getting confused and producing over complicated summaries. As far as possible candidates should try to produce a summary that allows them to show examiners what they can do and so copying should be discouraged, although obviously words and phrases cannot always be paraphrased wholly. The final product should be a short text that captures the required information from the text and presents it in the candidate's own language, with perhaps a short introduction to set the scene.

Final notes

It is essential that candidates read the instructions carefully and address all the bullet points.

Candidates should not copy large chunks from the texts but should select relevant information and make sure that what they are writing represents the information in the text clearly and accurately.

In the writing tasks, candidates should keep to the word limit.

Candidates should always leave time for proofing and editing at the end of the test.

4357/02 Listening

General comments

Generally candidates did well or very well on this paper. The three parts of the paper, Part 3 was found to be the most challenging for candidates.

Detailed comments

There were two general types of questions on this paper: multiple choice and note/sentence completion.

Multiple Choice

As a rule, candidates followed the instructions given in the rubric for this type of question.

Note/sentence completion

Generally these questions were well attempted, although there were some candidates who did not adhere to the three-word limit given in the rubric. Two issues arose out of these types of questions which require candidates to provide the word or words for the answer themselves.

Spelling

This proved to be a problem for many candidates. The general rule applied during marking was that if the answer affected communication, candidates were not awarded a mark. Candidates were not penalised for misspelling a word if it sounded like the target word. For example Q24 (answer poor people), a spelling such as 'poore people' was accepted. However, if the word sounded like a different word or was a different word (e.g. Q24 pore people), candidates were not awarded a mark.

Grammar

In a few questions e.g. Q23 and Q27, candidates were required to complete a sentence using the correct grammatical forms. Although these forms were given in the recording, candidates made errors in their answers. These were the most demanding of all the questions on this paper.

Advice to centres

It is recommended that centres prepare candidates for the listening examination by familiarising them with the style of the tests and with the types of questions they can expect to find on the paper.

Candidates should make good use of the time before the tape is played to consider possible answers and the context when providing their answers.

Candidates should be advised to follow the instructions in the rubric when answering questions and to adhere to the word limit.

Candidates should consider the grammatical fit of their answers in sentence completion questions.

Candidates should consider the spelling of words when providing their answers.

4357/03 Speaking

General comments

Generally the candidates did well on this paper. The paper is designed to become increasingly difficult, and this proved to be so for less able candidates, who struggled the most with Part 3. Candidates responded well to the structure of the test and seemed engaged by the content. The topics were ones which were familiar to them and they could call on their life experience to answer the questions.

Detailed comments

Interlocutors:

Several of the interlocutors carried out their functions most effectively. However, there were some who did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. All of the wording and questions were provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet some interlocutors did not keep to the questions in Part 1 and Part 3. Furthermore, a number of interlocutors did not ask the supplementary prompt in brackets on the frame cards when a candidate was less forthcoming with an answer. In a minority of instances, interlocutors dispensed with the script entirely and asked their own questions.

In Part 1, some interlocutors extended and developed the theme here and then allocated a short time for Part 3. The aim of Part 1 is to try to put the candidate at his/her ease by asking questions on a familiar topic.

In Part 2, some interlocutors did not ask questions in groups as indicated on the frame card but selected questions somewhat randomly. Each group of questions is generally based around a theme and questions become gradually more challenging as they progress through the group. When interlocutors did not follow the grouping of the questions they overlooked the advantages of graduating the questions they asked, and how the abilities of stronger candidates could be exploited by giving them the opportunity to answer some more challenging questions within the groups.

In Part 3, some questions had a follow-up question to encourage candidates to talk more. Some interlocutors failed to ask the second part of the question and this prevented candidates from developing their ideas more fully and thereby displaying their ability to use more complex language.

Question frames:

Some interlocutors chose to use a very limited number of question frames for the entire cohort of candidates.

Recommendations to centres

Interlocutors:

It is recommended that interlocutors spend more time preparing for the speaking examination so that they have a clear understanding of how it is organised and what the questions are before the start of the test. Time should also be taken to examine the structure of the examination and thereby gain an insight into the function of the various parts of the test.

Interlocutors are required to adhere to the questions and wordings contained on the frame cards and in the 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. They should not deviate from the script provided.

The role of the interlocutor is to enable candidates to talk about a number of topics. In consequence, they should not talk more than the candidate.

Interlocutors should avoid using words of encouragement such as 'that's good' and 'that's nice' as these mislead candidates about their performance. They should not prefix a question with comments on its level of difficulty, nor should they paraphrase more difficult questions without being asked to by the candidate. Furthermore, they should not regard the test as an opportunity to correct the candidates' utterances.

All candidates should receive the same amount of preparation time (1 minute) in Part 2.

Interlocutors should listen to what candidates are saying during the test to avoid irrelevant and repetitive questions being asked.

Interlocutors should not alter the speed at which they speak when conducting the examination. They should talk to candidates at their normal speaking speed. When interlocutors reduce their speaking speed they can become rather stilted and this can affect the candidates performance.

Question frames:

All frames should be used. Frames should never be shown to the candidates to read. Candidates should not be invited to choose the frames in Part 2.

Equipment:

Prior to the start of recording, interlocutors should conduct thorough pre-checks to ensure that the position of the microphone favours the candidate and that the volume on the tape is checked so that the best possible recording of the candidate can be obtained. It is further recommended that the best quality recorder and microphone available be used for the speaking test.

If a candidate is speaking very quietly he/she should be asked to speak up.

Interlocutors should make sure that there is enough space on a tape before they start recording a candidate. This avoids situations where the test has to be interrupted in order to turn over the tape.

Room:

Centres should allocate a quiet room for speaking examinations where extraneous noise is at a minimum and where there will be no interruptions during the course of the examination.

Stopping of the recording:

Recording should never be stopped during testing. This is clearly stated in page 5 of the Instructions for the conduct of examinations (Paper 3 - Speaking). This page also contains instructions on what steps need to be carried out should the tape be stopped.

Statistics for IGCSE English as a Second Language 4357

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary mark - Overall	89	79	69	59	52	45	39	33

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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