

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback Summer 2010

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357/01)
Unit 1: Reading and Writing



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Publications Code UG024227

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Unit 1: Reading and Writing (4357/01)

General Comments

In this paper texts for the reading and writing sections are drawn from authentic text sources with very little adaptation. Both sections aim to provide candidates with opportunities to read texts and write emails, reports and summaries which are of practical use in their learning lives. The candidates on the whole performed well on this paper. The written work was of a high standard and displayed clear evidence of preparation and practice prior to the examination.

Section A

In this section the candidates were required to read an article taken from a holiday brochure entitled "Farm Holidays". The questions here are devised to test skimming and scanning skills. Candidates were asked to match the sections (A - M) with the information listed in questions 1 to 10. It is important that candidates read the questions before commencing the task, so that they are aware of the key points they will need to identify in the text in order to carry out the matching exercise. Candidates should follow the instructions carefully in order to complete the task.

In responding to questions 1 to 10 in section A candidates found questions 1 and 5 to be the most challenging. Only 64% gained a mark for question 1 whilst 62% gained a mark for question 5. However, candidates were more successful in answering questions 4, 7 and 2. 90% of candidates gained a mark for question 4, 89% for question 7 and 85% for question 2.

Section B

In Section B candidates were presented with a magazine article about paprikas under the heading "HOT!HOT!HOT!". The questions in this section are designed to test reading for both gist and detail. Candidates were asked to answer 15 True/false/Not Given questions. As in Section A candidates were read the questions carefully to identify the main points in the text in order to locate the information, and then to decide whether the information given in the question was True, False or Not Given. In the Not Given option the candidates have to determine whether the information in the question was given in the text. The Not Given questions were related to the information in the text and so candidates had to read the text carefully in order to determine whether the information they were looking for was actually there or not.

The first five questions (11 to 15) in this section were statements that were either True, False or Not Given. The following ten questions (16 to 25) required the candidates to answer the questions using no more than 3 words taken from the text.

Candidates in general found the questions 11 to 15 challenging. Only 17% gained a mark for question 13 whilst 20% gained a mark for question 12. There was more success with questions 14 and 15 with 59% and 62% gaining marks respectively. The identification of statements that are Not Given seems to challenge a lot of candidates. This year question 12, "Columbus took the peppers back to Europe", was not given in the text yet many candidates indicated it as being true.

Section C

In the third section candidates were required to read the text "The life story of David Beckham" and answer 15 questions using no more than 3 words taken from the text. The questions in this section were designed to test reading for both gist and detail, following a line of argument or discussion and identifying attitudes and opinions in a text. Here information from the text is paraphrased and used in the questions. Again, the sentences are not complete and the candidates have to fill in the spaces using no more than four words or numbers taken from the text. For example, question 26:

"David Beckham has worked for a well-known international charity as a".

It is essential that candidates read the questions carefully in order to highlight key information, which would lead to the location of the relevant information in the text and so find the answers to complete the questions. They were not expected to manipulate language or information from the text. They should lift verbatim.

Able candidates performed very competently on all three sections. Weaker candidates however tended to leave some questions unanswered or which could not be substantiated by the text. Candidates in general performed well on this section of the paper. A remarkable 97% gained a mark for question 30 and 91% gained a mark for question 29. However there was less success for candidates answering questions 28 and 39 with a total of 43% gaining a mark for question 28 and 54% gaining a mark for 39. One of the reasons for candidate error in this section was that many candidates identified more than 3 words from the text to complete the answers. Such carpet bombing will not be credited: candidates should be trained to select just the required number of words.

Section D

In Section D candidates were required to write a letter to the principal outlining their ideas and suggestions for improvements to the school canteen. In the letter they also had to give reasons why it needed changing and suggest a change that could be made to the food. This task was to be completed using between 100 and 150 words. Candidates were given 3 bullet points, which they had to cover in in order to complete the task. It is essential that candidates address all of the bullet points within the given word limit. The task asks them to write between 100 and 150 words. Writing less than this is self penalising as the candidates will not be able to fully address the task in so few words. Candidates who go over the 150 word limit will lose a mark automatically for failing to complete the task within the 150 words. This task also required the candidates to provide their own opinions and ideas on the subject.

Overall this task was performed well and certainly provoked a range of lively and seemingly heart-felt responses, including one particularly memorable complaint about the indignities of being served blue salad! Candidates varied in the extent to which they adapted tone and register for their specified audience; some responses were rather on the terse side. As it says in the specifications, candidates should :“ write in a range of registers to fit the context and the audience” A letter to the principal of a school should be both formal and polite. In answering this some candidates failed to address all the bullet points and, as a consequence, they lose one mark. As with all questions, coverage of all bullets, *within the word limit*, is absolutely vital.

A typical response from an able candidate will communicate most successfully conveying the information in an appropriate tone and register for the audience. The writing will show effective use of vocabulary to meet the requirements of the task. The vocabulary will be appropriate and accurate in all respects. The writing will show a good range and control of grammatical structures with few errors. Finally, the response will be an extremely coherent piece of writing, successfully organised with confident and appropriate use of cohesive devices. It will require no effort on the part of the reader.

Section E

In Section E candidates were required to write an e-mail to their friends informing them that due to a move to a new school they were selling two course books. This task had several parts to it, clearly outlined in the bullet points and all parts had to be completed within the specified limit of 100 to 150 words. As in the previous section candidates will be penalised for not keeping within this limit or for not addressing all the bullet points outlined in the question. Candidates should bear in mind that to access the full range of marks they must cover all the listed bullet points. Centres are advised therefore that if a candidate omits one point either due to an oversight or because the information relating to that point lies outside the word count that such candidates restrict this access.

It is important that candidates maintain focus on the question and do not overlook important elements of the question. As with section D, some candidates struggled to use the right tone and produced a rather aggressively persuasive sales pitch more appropriate to an advert than to a message to friends. However, most candidates performed well and structured their responses effectively by focusing on the bullet points. Occasionally key words within the bullet points were misunderstood, particularly regarding the condition of the books, which some candidates interpreted as content. Overall, this task generated some thoughtful and engaging responses. Because this task is an email to a friend the tone and register will be different to the previous section which was a letter to a school principal. Non-formal words and phrases may be used. However that does not preclude the use of a full vocabulary which would allow for effective communication. Similarly candidates should maintain a good range of grammatical structures with few errors. In effect the response should communicate most successfully.

Section F

In Section F the candidates were required to read a given text and provide a summary of it in 100 to 150 words. Bullet points were included in the question indicating what was required in the summary. As in previous series, this is the section of the examination that candidates find most challenging. Many of the candidates were able to respond to this task at a very high standard and clearly understood the techniques of writing a summary.

This task tests the writing ability rather than the reading ability and thus the candidate is asked to produce a summary using their own words and phrases where possible for a given purpose or target reader.

However, there were examples of candidates copying large sections from the text and these candidates restricted their access to the full the full range of marks as were those who included irrelevant information. These candidates need to hone their summary writing techniques and require further preparation and practice in answering this type of question. In some cases candidates again failed to address all the required bullet points and were penalised.

All candidates should be given the skills they need to proofread and check what they have written to make sure they have addressed the task set and to correct any minor errors they might find. It would be helpful if centres could continue to reinforce two specific issues: there is no need to summarise any parts of the passage except for those identified in the bullet points, and responses should, so far as possible, be in candidates' own words.

In preparation for this type of question candidates should practise identifying and condensing important information on a text. Students need to be able to pick out the facts that represent the main message of a text then reproduce them in their own words. The written text that the students produce should be complete with a beginning and an end. Merely copying large chunks of the text should be discouraged as this does not allow the examiner to assess the candidate's level of language skill and therefore credit cannot be given.

Summary

Examiners were delighted to read reports and emails that demonstrated confident use of idiomatic language. The overall standard of the candidates made the task of marking this paper a pleasure and centres are to be commended on their thorough preparation of their candidates for this paper.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Subject mark	100	90	80	70	60	53	46	40	34

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