

Examiners' Report

January 2013

International GCSE English Language
(4EA0)

Paper 1

Level 1/Level 2 Certificate in English
Language
(KEA0)

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Introduction

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in January 2013 was adapted from *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* by Paul Theroux and described the experiences of the writer who returns with high expectations to a school that he used to be a volunteer at, but is disappointed by what he finds there. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, the RNLI Guide to Beach Safety. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-4

The passage studied in Section A was adapted from *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* by Paul Theroux and described the experiences of the writer who returns with high expectations to a school that he used to be a volunteer at, but is disappointed by what he finds there. The passage proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension.

Question 1 tested the skill of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to identify the town where the writer grew up. There was only one correct answer and most candidates were able to identify it. Those who did not gain this mark did so because they gave the name of the town that the writer travelled to, rather than the one he came from.

Question 2 asked candidates to give three words or phrases that the writer uses to describe the town of Limbe. There were seven possible correct answers to choose from. The majority were able to gain all three marks but there was a full range of responses. For those who did not score well on this answer they tended to give words and phrases that described the writer's feelings about visiting the school, which were optimistic and uplifting, whereas his feelings about Limbe were darker and less positive.

Question 3 asked candidates to explain how the writer had used comparisons to develop his thoughts and feelings within a set line limit. Out of the four marks available many achieved full marks and explained about the comparison of the school buildings before and after to develop his feelings of loss. Where candidates did not score full marks they strayed too far from the question and did not focus upon the technique of comparison or offered comparisons that fell outside the set line limit.

Question 4 asked candidates about the creation of atmosphere in the passage and provided bullet points for additional support and structure. All centres should recognise that the key discriminator in Section A is the higher mark tariff question and its focus on the writer's technique. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as the wet and misty weather to the exclusion of other points. Many candidates focused on the title and wrote at length about his disappointment in what he finds, but failed to fully explain the opening section of high anticipation and the language that the writer uses here.

Better answers explored the rise and fall in expectations from the opening optimism, followed by the depressing and threateningly sinister town of Limbe after which the mood is lifted with the quality of the road that leads to the school. Many commented on the use of a short and abrupt sentence to change the mood, fewer commented on the paragraph break. This is indicative of a general discriminator in this answer where less successful responses sometimes struggled with the idea of atmosphere at all and simply focused on isolated experiences described in the text. More successful responses recognised a before and after experience and produced relevant if sometimes polarised answers where everything before the school was good and everything after his arrival was bad. The most able recognised the differences in atmosphere and used the text to craft an explanation that focused upon this, using textual references which were apt and carefully chosen.

Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrated higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. Linked text and paraphrase does not constitute an explanation. Better answers made extensive use of the extended metaphor of spectres and haunting, some even tying in the dank and dreary weather as part of the same milieu. Surprisingly few made good use of the educational metaphor of planting seeds.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

This question was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Your Guide to Beach Safety*, and focused upon how the writer tries to engage the reader in the advice given. As a prepared text almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of the text. As a media text the expectation was that candidates would focus upon features of presentation, image and layout as well as that of language. Weaker responses were often quasi-narratives that did not focus upon the question and simply described what could be seen on each page of the leaflet. Many began by commenting on the use of colour with weaker responses simply identifying that they were bright and bold, even contrasting; stronger responses recognised the symbolism of the colours with red for danger, yellow as the sand and blue as the sea, and that these are also the corporate colours of the RNLI itself. Stronger responses were those that were able to detail a wide range of features and to appreciate how the writer often used colour, image, language and layout for combined effect, rather than as isolated elements of the leaflet.

Question 6

The writing task in section B was closely related to the reading text in section B and asked candidates to write a magazine article giving teenagers advice on how to stay safe. This title produced a wide range of responses with some making direct use of the leaflet to write about beach safety, whilst for many others their advice related to drugs, underage sex, drink, social networking and being safe when out of the house. As a title it was accessible to almost all candidates. The weakest responses were often incomplete, communicating at a basic level that showed little awareness of the reader. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language conventions of advice texts, adopting a wide range of tones and showing a strong ability to make an emotional connection with the reader through shared experience or strong expressions of concern.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were asked to write a letter to a newspaper explaining their views on a government proposal to remove sport from school. This proved to be accessible to most candidates and generated strong responses in favour and against the proposal. It is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final, 20 mark question, are sometimes not answered at all by candidates. It is vital that students time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them.

This question produced many heartfelt responses with some desperately concerned about the implications for obesity in the young whilst others welcomed the removal of a subject that had been the source of bullying for them and one for which they had little regard.

Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, often not making good use of the bullet pointed list intended to help candidates. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure which will keep them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands.

In contrast, more able responses wrote with imagination and communicated passion and interest in writing that was noted for its variety and sophistication, its accuracy and control, at all times sharply focused upon the needs of the reader.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Candidates are strongly encouraged to practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support them in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through effective paragraphing and structuring their writing. At all times have the intended reader in mind and make word level, sentence level and text level choices with a clear understanding of the intended effect. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and candidates should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind.

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