

# Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2009

IGCSE English Language (4355) Paper 03



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### Question 1: Reading

There were markedly differing levels of response to this question, which was based on 'The Necklace.' At the lowest level of attainment, candidates copied out the text. Another form of irrelevance entailed writing about Mathilde Loisel rather than Monsieur Loisel; this resulted, in the case of a few of the weakest candidates, from a complete misreading of the question. Some candidates began by writing about Monsieur Loisel, but then directed their attention much more towards Mathilde, perhaps reproducing prepared, or taught notes. Much further up the attainment scale were candidates who focused on the character of Monsieur Loisel, but in terms of what made him an interesting character rather than, as the question required, about how well he was presented. The most successful candidates addressed the issue of presentation directly. Many of these considered whether he was a minor or major character, and his importance in relation to the central character of Mathilde; some commented that he was initially a foil, but later became more dominant, often noting that he was responsible for the tragic failure to tell the truth to Madame Forestier. There were also a few interesting comments about his being a symbol - of the indulgent husband or of his social class.

The bullet points provided a structure for most responses, though the best answers used them as pointers rather than as sub-questions. The quality of the references to language was often a key discriminator. The weakest candidates tended to list generic features of language, many of which had more reference to Mathilde than to her husband, whilst stronger candidates focused on key features (for example his stammering comments to his wife when she says she has nothing to wear, the description of him at the beginning as "her cheeseparing clerk of a husband" and, after the loss, as "pale-faced and hollow-eyed") and attempted to evaluate their effectiveness in presenting his character.

Overall, stronger answers were focused on the question, bringing in relevant comment on all the bullet points, including the one referring to use of language; they also supported their points with brief quotations or succinct textual references. It was noticeable that answers attaining higher marks were often prefaced by plans, or had preliminary notes and annotation written on the actual text printed in the paper. Such answers usually showed that the candidate had revised thoroughly and knew the text very well.

Weaker answers failed to address, or only partially addressed, the central question about presentation and tended to use the bullet points as sub-headings; if quotations were used, these tended to be over long and often more relevant to Mathilde than Monsieur Loisel. Such answers also revealed a less than close familiarity with the actual text. There was a sense, sometimes, in responses that dealt with less than half the text, that candidates were having to waste valuable examination time by re-reading the whole story.

### Question 2: Writing

Overall the writing questions were answered reasonably well, but the overall command of technical and grammatical accuracy was weaker than in the summer series of examinations.

#### 2 (a)

Candidates were asked to consider two viewpoints on honesty and to give their own views on them. Overall the ablest candidates seemed to have been drawn to this question and there were some good, sometimes excellent responses to this question. Many presented an internal monologue of argument in a revealing ways, often concluding that, whilst total honesty remained a goal or an ideal, it was not always feasible, or even desirable, to be

completely frank. This summary does less than justice to the depth and subtlety of the arguments used in the best responses to this searching question.

## 2 (b)

This question required the candidate to giving advice to his or her own family on planning a successful celebration. This was the least well answered question. Many candidates unnecessarily placed the advice (often helpful in itself) in a narrative or descriptive setting, whereas the question simply required advice to be given. There were some strong answers, however, and these characteristically outlined the candidate's advice on what would make a successful party in clear detail. More successful candidates typically adopted a courteous but confident tone; made lucid suggestions or gave precise tips; used the imperative effectively "Make sure you do this...Try to avoid that"; used the second person pronoun to make a connection with the recipient of the advice.

## 2 (c)

This question linked up with a quotation from the story ("How strange life is, how changeable!") and required candidates to write about an experience which made them think in the same way. This was a popular question which targeted the "narrate, entertain' verbs in the triplet. Most answers attained a reasonable level of success. Many opted for first person narratives and their stories (often from a very adult perspective of worldly success or failure - one wrote about resigning from his job as an airline pilot in order to marry the girl of his dreams) broadly illustrated the point. Whilst there was no requirement to write about actual personal experience, those candidates who seemed to be writing directly from experience ( for instance about parental divorce, the loss of a close relative, disappointment or success in examinations and so on) tended to produce sharper and more effective accounts. The least successful candidates were those who simply reproduced a prepared story, tagging the phrase onto the end in an unconvincing way.

**iGCSE English Language:**

**Option 1**

03 WRITTEN ALTERNATIVE

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Paper No	C	D	E	F	G
Lwr	57	47	38	29	20

**Option 2**

04 WRITTEN COURSEWORK

05 SPEAKING & LISTENING CSWK

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Paper No	C	D	E	F	G
Lwr	57	47	35	24	13

**Option 3**

03 WRITTEN ALTERNATIVE

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Paper No	*	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	77	68	59	51	42	37

**Option 4**

04 WRITTEN COURSEWORK

05 SPEAKING & LISTENING CSWK

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Paper No	*	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	82	72	62	53	42	36

**Option 5**

04T TRANSFERRED WRITTEN CSWK.

05T TRANSF.SPEAK.& LIST.CSWK

1F WRITTEN PAPER 1F

Paper No	C	D	E	F	G
Lwr	59	47	35	24	13

**Option 6**

04T TRANSFERRED WRITTEN CSWK.

05T TRANSF.SPEAK.& LIST.CSWK

2H WRITTEN PAPER 2H

Paper No	*	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	82	72	62	53	42	36

**Note:** Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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