

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

IGCSE

IGCSE English Language (4355) Paper 03

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Question 1

Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' clearly engaged candidates from a wide variety of cultures, who responded strongly both to theme and language. The question asked candidates to write about how the poet brought out 'the reality of war'; there were detailed and lengthy answers throughout the range. The most successful addressed the question directly and wrote detailed and well referenced commentaries. Less successful answers showed various kinds of irrelevance. Some candidates wrote about the poem in a general way, reproducing taught notes, or explained what happened in the poem and what it was about, or paraphrased it. These approaches failed to answer the question as it was set and inevitably limited the candidate's level of attainment to, at most, the 7-8 band in the middle of the marking grid, as they demonstrated little more than a "*fair understanding of how the writer tries to bring out the reality of war*". Other candidates wasted time on interesting, but not strictly relevant, details of the historical background to the poem or gave biographical information about Owen; neither of these approaches focused on the crucial topic of the writer's use of techniques, especially language. Some attempted to write about Owen's use of linguistic techniques by identifying them (sometimes incorrectly) and listing them, without relating them either to the question or to their impact on the reader: for example, "*Metaphores is another technique used in this poem. In line 14 he writes "Under a green sea, I saw him drowning."* Stronger responses integrated references to techniques with commentary on the question, for example, "*his sight is 'helpless' - the speaker knows there is no point in trying to save him as he 'drowns' in a metaphorical sea of gas. This emphasises the harsh reality of war - the matter of fact tone shows that soldiers have to accept these shocking scenes.*" Another limiting approach involved treating the bullet points as sub sections of the question or as separate questions. Some candidates wrote mini-essays on each bullet point; in some instances this meant that the points made on the final bullet point ('*any other interesting use of language*') repeated earlier comments. The bullet points are intended to help candidates think about key aspects of texts in relation to the question; more successful answers used them as prompts rather than supplementary sections of the question. The bullet points may be used to structure an answer, but candidates should ensure that the focus is always on the lead or main question. The mark scheme relates to this and does not allot marks for each bullet point. Overall, however, the answers were impressive and there were some excellent responses. The ability of a candidate to interpret the final section of the poem, especially the role of the narrator and his intended audience, was often a key feature of the best answers.

Question 2 (a)

This was the most popular of the writing options. Responses were often engaging and detailed. Arguments were made in favour of both viewpoints, though the overwhelming majority of candidates favoured family over friends. A weakness of many answers was a kind of 'stream of consciousness' approach which led to rather loose, over conversational expression, for example "*Well the answer will always be my family no matter what. First of all the thing is family will always be there for you no matter.*" More successful were those candidates who analysed each statement in detail, or weighed the pros and cons of each, before expressing, sometimes engagingly, a final, considered opinion, for example, "*So, who would I choose, family of friends? Friends. Call me strange, but I much prefer the fickle friendships I have with classmates to the dull and obvious relationships with my siblings*". A few, very able candidates deconstructed the statements, for instance, questioning whether in fact it was true that one did not choose one's family, or analysed the implications of

'trust' in some detail. Many candidates used anecdotal evidence very effectively - and often amusingly - whilst some opted for a serious approach, quoting various kinds of expert witnesses to provide evidence for their own opinions. This was a question which addressed the triplet verb 'argue'; some of the weakest responses were stories about family or friends which, in a generalised way, were about the central question, but did not directly answer it.

Question 2 (b)

The topic of mobile phones clearly has universal resonance and the issues in schools and colleges seem similar for every culture and community. Most candidates saw their advantages in terms of personal safety and ease of communication, and the disadvantages - distraction in class, playing non-educational games, disturbance of study, bullying - were also clearly outlined. Most candidates were strongly in favour of mobile phones being allowed in schools, but with sensible restrictions on their use; a significant minority, however, wanted them banned altogether. Most candidates had a clear sense of how to structure and write a formal letter of this kind and showed an appropriate awareness of tone. Stronger responses focused on giving advice, supporting this with reasons and evidence, and presented clear ideas on appropriate rules for the use of mobile phones in school, for example, "*Also, madam, I am sure that you are well aware of the side effects that the increased use of mobile phones could have on the brain as the result of the microwaves it uses to transmit signals.*" Some of the strongest answers were also made more effective by the use of a variety of linguistic techniques. Weaker answers tended to be over formal in expression and conveyed information rather than advice, for example, "*Dear Madame, Good Afternoon! I hereby take this opportunity to give you my personal review towards the use of mobile phones in school.*" Some candidates also spent unnecessary time formatting their letters with both the sender's and the recipient's address included at the head. The focus of assessment in writing questions is always on the quality of expression, and, specifically, in questions requiring answers in the form of a letter, this should be primarily demonstrated in the body of the letter; there is no need to include addresses.

Question 2 (c)

This question produced a wide range of stories and attracted both able and weaker candidates. The degree of relevance was sometimes a key discriminator. The least successful tagged 'The Old Lie' onto a prepared story which could sometimes have fitted any title, or wrote about any kind of deception rather than an 'old' or deep-rooted lie. The most successful reflected the irony of the phrase's use in the poem, whether it was about school days being "*the happiest days of your life*" or of "*blood being thicker than water.*" Many followed Owen's exemplar, contrasting the reality of war with its propaganda, the setting (typically Afghanistan) often updated to the modern era. Such stories were often complex and used narrative features (for example dramatic dialogue and atmospheric description) to good effect. Whilst the best responses were tailored to the time available, often ending deftly with the title of Owen's poem, some candidates found it less easy to do this and lost momentum by unnecessary detail. Many weaker answers were characterised by a lack of basic structure, some without beginning, middle or ending. There were some successful (even sophisticated) attempts at humour, many of which focused on the moment the candidate realised, as a child, that Father Christmas was not all he seemed to be: "*Santa wasn't real. The information shook my heart, all these years, lied to, betrayed. The knowledge left a santa-shaped hole in my heart nothing could ever fill.*"

IGCSE English Language: 4355 Grade Boundaries

Option 1 - 03, 1F

C	D	E	F
59	49	39	29

Option 2 - 04, 05, 1F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 3 - 03, 2H

*	A	B	C	D	E
76	68	60	53	45	41

Option 4 - 04, 05, 2H

*	A	B	C	D	E
80	71	62	54	43	37

Option 5 - 04T, 05T, 1F

C	D	E	F
60	47	34	22

Option 6 - 04T, 05T, 2H

*	A	B	C	D	E
80	71	62	54	43	37

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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