



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level

In English Language (WEN01)

Unit 1: Language: Context and Identity

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WEN01 introduces students to how language is used in data from a range of sources. Students explore how the contexts of production and reception affect language choices in spoken and written texts. Students also explore how language reflects and constructs the identity or identities of the user and varies depending on the contexts of production and reception. Students apply appropriate methods of language analysis to a range of written, spoken or multimodal data taken from 20th and 21st century sources using the key language frameworks and levels. They also demonstrate their understanding through the creation of a new text for a specified audience, purpose and context.

In the January 2025 examination, Text A was taken from an article from the online version of the *National Geographic* magazine by Elizabeth Royte, an American freelance journalist. In the article, Royte introduces the findings and views of Debra Lee Magadini, a researcher at Columbia University, and Chelsea Rochman, a professor of ecology at the University of Toronto, as she explores the potential impact on our health of microplastics in the fish and shellfish we eat.

Text B develops the identity of Manar Elkebir, a 17-year-old environmentalist from Tunisia through an extract from her blog posted to the *Voices of Youth* website. Here, she outlines her 'activism journey' and programme to combat plastic pollution in the oceans.

Question 1 asked candidates to analyse and compare how the language of both texts conveyed personal identity. Three bullet points offered additional prompts and guidance directly linked to the Assessment Objectives (and the mark scheme) for this component and reminding candidates of the specific areas of study they should apply to the task:

- relevant language frameworks and levels
- concepts and issues such as social, cultural and gender factors
- contextual factors such as mode, field, function and audience

Centres are advised that the format and focus of the question will be consistent across the lifetime of the specification. Actual wording may, inevitably, change depending on the nature and content of the two unseen texts presented. However, the focus of assessment is clearly stated in the question stem with its prompt to consider and compare how personal identity is constructed and presented in the source materials. The bullet points remind candidates of the areas of study they should apply to this comparative exploration and are linked directly to the Assessment Objectives applied by examiners to their responses. The mark scheme contains indicative content and may well provide centres with a useful resource when preparing their students for subsequent examinations.

The texts were clearly linked by the issue of marine plastic pollution. There was much opportunity for candidates to explore the links and contrasts between them. A key focus of the question was the construction and presentation of personal identity, and the ability of candidates to incorporate this into their analysis proved something of a discriminator, with a significant minority struggling with this concept. Those that framed their analysis through this central focus were rewarded.

In January 2025, responses to Section A covered a full range of achievement. Most candidates offered consideration of the genre and context of both texts and were able to draw links between them based on their central focus on the issue of plastic pollution and its impact on the environment. They were also able to offer comparative consideration of the

differing audience and context of each text and shape these – with varying success – through the differing perspectives and circumstances of the writers.

The source texts proved to be accessible to most candidates and the majority offered a balanced consideration of both and the theme that linked them. Most candidates could differentiate context well and most responses across the range could point to more complex aspects of each. These included the multiple functions of both texts. When exploring Text A most commented on the nature and conventions of the article and its wide, international audience of those interested in environmental issues. Many referenced the professional authority of Rochman and Magadini as scientists and how they made Royte’s arguments more convincing. For Text B, candidates were able to comment on the blog genre and Elkebir’s confident, passionate voice as well as her well-informed understanding of the issues. Successful responses often developed insightful contrasts between the experiences of the different voices/identities within Text A and then compared again with Elkebir in Text B. There were also some competent explorations of the interlinked issues surrounding marine pollution, the health benefits of eating seafood and the risks of consuming microplastics in Text A, and the impact of single-use plastics on the environment and marine pollution in Text B.

It was pleasing to see that many centres had made use of the support afforded by the Examiner Report and the indicative content in the mark scheme produced in previous series. This enabled many to meet more of the specific requirements of the Assessment Objectives but centres should be aware that this has potential pitfalls. Many used these documents as a framework for their responses which ensured coverage and structure in the mid-bands of achievement, but which sometimes led to repetition at the lower levels and, in some, less frequent, cases, restricted responses at the mid to upper levels. In these instances, candidates sometimes looked for direct points of comparison across frameworks that were not really evident in the texts themselves, and the subsequent analysis was somewhat strained/forced as a result. Those that used the mark scheme framework to provide ‘subheadings’ sometimes generated repetitive and or/undeveloped responses, with significant negative impact on the crucial analysis (at word and sentence level) central to performance at AO1 and AO2. Centres are advised that the mark scheme offers indicative content – it is not prescriptive, and given the nature of the specific frameworks considered, there is considerable overlap. Candidates need to be selective and only apply framework that relate directly to the task and which can be exemplified directly from the source materials. They should also consider language choices and techniques at every opportunity and integrate these into the body of their response.

AO4 requires candidates to explore connections and contrasts between the source texts. Comparative work was usually helpful in lifting responses into Level 4 (at least) enabling candidates to demonstrate a more discriminating approach to the data. There continues to be a pleasing increase in responses approaching this comparison in an integrated manner. Others, however, lacked confidence to deal with the texts in an integrated comparative approach and dealt with them in separate sections and this negatively impacted on the potential for reward. The most successful responses seized the many opportunities for comparison and contrast. Many explored the purpose of the texts and developed links through the informative and persuasive function of each. Many picked up on the fact that both texts were clearly linked by the issue of marine pollution but were differentiated by the ages of the writers and their potential audiences, and the genres of the texts.

Successful investigations of Text A were controlled and insightful, focusing on the presentation of identity and foregrounding this in integrated exploration of a wider range of language features and concepts. Responses that were placed in the highest bands of achievement supported comment and assertion with evidence directly drawn from the text which was used to explore the specific language choices made, applying terminology in good range and across frameworks. These linked comment to the concept of 'voice'/persona as constructed by Royte, and in turn Magadini and Rochman, through consideration of her shaping of the scientific investigation on complex environmental issues in an accessible and relatable manner. It is this link between form and function/effect that signals a successful response. These answers looked the conventions of the article itself and how its structure and content was shaped by Royte to develop a balanced appraisal of the issues. Higher level responses also found more to explore in the subtle nature of pragmatics such as how audience response would be affected by language devices rather than just noticing them. They were able to comment on the language choices made in order to fulfil both the informative/persuasive function and to enable the development and presentation of voice and identity of Royte.

Even in less successful responses, candidates were able to describe method and effect but many at the mid-lower levels of achievement struggled to apply specific language terms to their consideration of how – and why – these effects were produced. A more systematic approach, whereby comments are supported by evidence drawn directly from the source materials would have provided candidates with the opportunity to explore the language from which this evidence was comprised (applying concepts, terms and frameworks) and would have enabled them to reach the requirement for the higher levels of achievement at AO1 and AO2 provided in the mark scheme. Some responses used a range of impressive language terms to describe language features but did not go beyond a descriptive/feature spotting approach and marks had to be restricted because of failure to link to context/purposes. A list-like approach/feature spotting is not a successful way to tackle this question. Some responses in the lower levels of achievement tended to rely on a framework that was not always helpful to them, with an over-focus on graphology and basic language observations rather than analysis of these. Some general listing of features with limited explanation was also seen without any link to function. Often examples were missing so the comments were not given the opportunity to expand and demonstrate understanding.

Some offered generalised comments on context, whilst those that were more developed commented not only on the background context of the texts but also on key aspects of production and reception of each (including key generic conventions) and were rewarded accordingly.

Successful investigations of Text B recognised Elkebir's connection with her family and her birthplace, Gabes in Tunisia, and how this informs her voice. They detected the shift/movement from the personal account of her childhood experiences to broader consideration of marine environmental issues and plastic pollution to descriptions of her activism and a call to action.

As with Text A, successful answers were able to offer specific analytical comment on the crafting of the blog to further the multiple functions of the text. These supported comment and assertion with evidence directly drawn from the text which was used to explore the specific language choices made, applying terminology in good range and across frameworks. This link between form and function/effect again signalling a successful response.

Less successful responses offered generalised comment on the context of the blog and adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Those that offered limited exemplification and limited specific analysis of the language used were anchored in the mid/lower bands of achievement. Limited consideration the construction and presentation of the personal identity of Elkebir, negatively impacted on the success of the response. These tended to outline the links and contrasts between the two texts but failed to develop any but the more obvious or to explore the language which evidenced these. Such responses were characterised by an essentially descriptive approach. A significant number of candidates took a summary approach to the content of the texts which is not a useful approach to achieve marks. This proves reading ability but not an ability to analyse language features in use.

It should be noted that there was some misreading of Text B, leading to confusion over the gender of Manar Elkebir. Whilst it is not a significant issue in itself that many candidates assumed that the 'theater actress' was male, it did lead to some irrelevant comparison based on gender theory in a number of responses. As outlined above, the analysis of the linguistic frameworks, with detailed explanation of effect and linked to context, is usually a much richer source of discussion for this unit than the application of theory.

Q2 (Section B) of the examination is assessed against AO5:

'Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways'.

As such the task assesses both the fluency and accuracy of written expression and the ability to generate an original and (hopefully) engaging text.

In January 2025 candidates were asked to produce the text for a speech to be made at a youth environmental conference. Their speech would be used at the launch of a campaign to encourage young people to work together to persuade political leaders of their country to reduce marine plastics pollution.

The second part of the question:

'In addition to your own ideas you must refer to material from at least one of the texts in the Source Booklet'

is standard and thus affords comparability year on year. It highlights a key requirement of the task, that is the need to adapt some material from one (or both) of the source texts into the article.

The format of the question is relatively constant, but wording will, inevitably, change according to the nature of the creative task set. As this is a creative response, examiners will accept any approach that concedes to the prompts provided. However, the wording of the question will always specify generic form – in this paper a speech; broader context - here a youth environmental conference; audience - here the conference is aimed at young people; function - in this paper to inform and to persuade listeners to join a national campaign demanding political leaders to reduce marine plastics pollution.

There seemed a slight improvement in responses to Q2 this year. This reflects the ongoing trend for the paper. Candidates appeared to enjoy this section and there were many heartfelt responses – often successfully drawing on the source texts.

Successful responses effectively applied the generic conventions of a speech with some skill. These produced clear, well-structured responses and demonstrated an understanding of writing for an audience, experimenting with register. They demonstrated clear awareness of audience and purpose, conceding clearly to the persuasive/informative function of the task and to the underlying political agenda. The best adapted the source material fluidly to produce viable speech that fully conceded to the audience, purpose and context highlighted in the question stem. The best reshaped the sources fluidly and many shaped their speech to their specific national perspective – these generally scored well. Higher level responses really addressed the audience and purpose of this specific task – addressing young people and encouraging them to target political leaders about the issues.

Some candidates had clearly failed to read the full requirements of the task, producing generic, if engaging, speeches about marine plastic pollution that did not address the appropriate youth audience and/or did not have the end goal of encouraging the audience to persuade political leaders. Such responses were inevitably self-limiting.

A key requirement of this creative task is that it MUST draw on, and reshape, the material from at least one of the source texts – there were some very engaging responses that failed to do this and were essentially self-penalising.

Many, in the mid-range of achievement could adopt a tone or ‘voice’ which was convincing even if the technical accuracy in written English was lacking.

Less successful responses were often very brief which severely restricted links to the source materials or the ability to fully engage the reader. Others appeared to be rushed and undeveloped, suggesting that some candidates did not manage their time effectively. In less successful answers there was evidence of lifting of source material rather than reworking of this was also seen in weaker responses.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a wide range of effective and interesting rhetorical and linguistic devices available to candidates when writing speeches. For some candidates, aside from the occasional direct address to the audience at the start of the response or the use of some rhetorical questions, there was little evidence to suggest that they had studied or practised speechwriting as a genre. They are encouraged to be more deliberate in the shaping of their own writing and in the methods they employ.

