



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
In English (4EA1) Paper 01

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## Principal Examiner's Report for 4EA1 01 November 2023

### Introduction

The examination paper covered in this report is Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing which is sat by all candidates. The second opportunity to sit this paper has now moved from January to November.

The paper is organised into two parts.

Section A, worth a total of 45 marks, tests reading skills and is based on an unseen passage and a text from the International GCSE English Anthology with a total word count across the two extracts of approximately 2000 words. In this series, the unseen extract was adapted from *Beyond Possible*, in which the writer, Nims Purja, describes an accident he had whilst climbing the mountain Nangba Parbat in Pakistan. The Anthology text was the extract from *127 Hours: Between a Rock and a Hard Place* in which Aron Ralston recalls his experience of a rock-climbing accident in a canyon. Candidates are advised to spend about 1 hour and 30 minutes on this section.

Section B, also worth a total of 45 marks, offers candidates a choice of two transactional writing tasks. A particular form will always be specified and for this series the two tasks were to write an article for a sports website on the subject of extreme sports or a speech giving views on the statement 'There are certain rules of behaviour that we should all try to follow in life.'

The paper was well received with examiners commenting on how the unseen text worked successfully with the Anthology text, was accessible to students of all abilities and provided ample material for the comparison question. It was clear that many candidates engaged fully with both texts and responded with interest and enthusiasm.

There was evidence that, on the whole, candidates had been well-taught for the examination, with most of them attempting every question, but they should be reminded to read all the printed instructions on the examination paper very carefully and follow them precisely. They should also be aware of the Assessment Objectives that relate to each question. It is also important that attention is paid to timing so that sufficient time is given to the high tariff questions.

### Section A

Questions 1-3 are based on the unseen extract and are all assessed for **AO1**: Read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives.

#### Question 1

This question, which tests the skills of selection and retrieval, is intended to serve as a straightforward way into the paper and the vast majority of candidates were able to select two apt words or phrases that suggest that Nims is moving quickly. There were a number of possible points on the mark scheme; all were chosen but points three and four ('at a rapidly increasing speed' and 'metre after metre passed by') were those mostly commonly chosen.

The given line references for the question were 7-9 and hardly any candidates selected words or phrases from outside of these lines.

A very few candidates simply copied out the whole of the given lines and could not be awarded any marks as no selection of relevant material had been made. It is important to remember that single words or short phrases are all that is required to gain the marks. There is no need for any comment

on, or explanation of, the quotations chosen. Where candidates lost a mark it tended to be because they separated the phrase 'rapidly increasing speed' into two or where they selected the phrase 'fatal move' which was an incorrect answer.

## Question 2

This is a 4-mark question that requires candidates to interpret information, ideas and perspectives. For this examination they were asked to look at lines 48-58 and explain what we learn about Nims Purja. Examiners noted that most candidates knew what was required and were able to identify the relevant information in the text. There was a good range of possible points that could be made and many candidates achieved full marks; most commonly they commented on the facts that Nims had only started climbing above 8,000 metres in recent years, that he quickly became very skilled, that he could regain his strength efficiently and come down mountains quickly.

Candidates need to follow the instruction '**In your own words**' and examiners did feel that a number were struggling to do so with some candidates making only minor adaptations to the text; this was where marks were most often lost. It is not sufficient just to alter a verb ending or a pronoun and copying out large parts of the text is unlikely to lead to marks being awarded. Examiners noted that some candidates answered in the style of a Question 3 response and used quotations. On the whole, such candidates did enough in interpreting and explaining the quotations to still meet the 'own words' requirement but quotations should not be used for Question 2.

Examiners reported that the most successful approach employed by candidates was to make four clear and distinct points. However, it is important to remember that the question asks candidates to 'explain' and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at length, it is not acceptable to simply list very brief points. The response should be written in full and complete sentences that clearly show understanding and secure interpretation.

A few candidates did not achieve full marks because they provided an overview of the whole extract and did not focus on the question or the given line references. A very small number of candidates confused the writer's name with that of the mountain.

## Question 3

This is the final AO1 question; it is worth 5 marks and, like Question 2, requires candidates to show their understanding of the text by selecting and interpreting ideas, information and perspectives. For this examination, they were asked to describe what happened to Nims in lines 60-71.

In Question 3, candidates are told that they 'may support' their points 'with **brief** quotations' and many did so to good effect. Examiners reported that most candidates achieved at least 3 marks, with many achieving the full 5 marks. Successful candidates often worked methodically through the set section of the text identifying key points. There were a number of possible points in the mark scheme with the most popular being that Nims was falling down the mountain very quickly and that he tried to use his ice axe to slow him down and end the fall. A few candidates made reference to the whole text rather than the specified lines.

Many candidates adopted the very successful approach of making five clear points, sometimes set out separately on the page, written in full and complete sentences and supported by relevant brief quotations. Some relied on integrated quotations to make a point but explanations are needed to act as evidence of understanding and quotations should only be used to support these points

There is no need for comments on the language used in the quotations, but examiners noted that a small number of candidates spent time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which they could not here be credited and which may have led to a disproportionate amount of time being spent on the question.

The best answers used a good balance of short quotation and some interpretation, paid attention to how many marks the question is worth and made five clear and discrete points.

#### **Question 4**

This question is on Text Two, the Anthology text, and is assessed for **AO2**: Understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. It is therefore a more challenging and discriminatory question and is worth 12 marks divided over five levels.

In this examination, candidates were asked how the writer, Aron Ralston uses language and structure to convey his thoughts and feelings about what happens in the canyon.

This piece contains a very wide range of features of language and structure as exemplified in the mark scheme, but examiners were advised that these are just examples of possible points that could be made and instructed that they must reward any valid points that candidates make that are securely rooted in the text. There does not need to be an equal number of points on language and structure, but both should be addressed as, indeed, they were by nearly all candidates. It was evident to examiners that most candidates had a secure knowledge of this text and could approach the question with reasonable confidence but there were certainly a few who did not seem very familiar with it and so found the question particularly challenging.

Examiners commented that the majority of responses offered at the least some understanding of the text and that many candidates attempted to answer the question thoroughly. At the lower levels, candidates either identified features of language (and sometimes structure) but offered little explanation of their effect or described and made general comments on the text. At times there was limited focus on the question with some only writing a general summary of events. At this level, candidates offered a straightforward narrative account of the text with vague observations such as ‘the writer used short sentences for impact’.

Mid-level candidates tended to work through the text, made a sound range of points and selected apt textual references for support, but often did not move on to analyse closely the impact or connotations of individual words and phrases or fully consider the effect of the structural features. Examiners noted that whilst there was plenty written about use of the first person, the fact that the piece is written in the present tense and the impact of this went largely ignored. Other elements of the text that were commonly selected for analysis were the use of alliteration and short sentences. It is important that comments refer specifically to the impact of these features within the given text and are not simply general statements such as ‘short sentences are used for impact’.

The most successful responses engaged with the whole text with real enthusiasm, with many exploring the differences between Ralston’s calm, methodical approach in the early sections and the panic that ensues following the accident. Many candidates examined the metaphor of ‘the backlit chockstone ... consumes the sky’ effectively.

At this level, candidates were discriminating in their use of quotations, linking different parts of the text.

Some candidates tended to spend too long on unnecessary introductions and conclusions that simply repeated the points already made; the focus should be on making a range of relevant points, not simply reiteration. There were also some candidates who referred to the italicised introduction in their answer or to knowledge they have of the author which is not included in the extract, for example explaining how he eventually freed himself; unless points are firmly linked to what is in the extract they cannot be credited.

### Question 5

This question provides the only assessment in the specification of **AO3**: Explore links and connections between writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed.

This question is the most demanding of those in Section A and, with 22 marks distributed between five levels, carries almost half of the total marks available for reading so it is extremely important that candidates allow sufficient time for a developed response. Perhaps because of time constraints, there were a few candidates who did not attempt the question or who wrote very brief responses and thereby missed the opportunity to gain a significant number of marks. Careful time-management is crucial for success in this examination and candidates should factor in time to plan with care the points that they wish to make in order to ensure that they have a wide and balanced range.

Examiners recognise the challenge of the question and it was pleasing to note that nearly all candidates achieved some degree of success with one examiner noting that 'most candidates- even in the low-scoring responses – have adopted a good structure for their paragraphs, clearly identifying a comparison in the opening sentence before looking at each text in turn and providing a quotation.' Some candidates had made a brief plan which often contributed to a more thoughtful, exploratory approach based on key elements of similarity or difference rather than an explanatory, chronological approach to the texts.

At the lower end, candidates tended to focus on obvious links between the texts such as both being about men climbing, both describe an accident, one was in Pakistan and one was in America and offered some narrative comment. Some candidates at this level retold the events of each text, sometimes with greater emphasis on one text, rather than focusing on comparison or examining the perspectives and experiences of the narrators.

The more successful responses focused almost immediately on comparing specific details of the extracts and looked at the writers' perspectives as well as their ideas and balanced points, confidently interweaving thoughts on both texts with exemplification and exploration of ideas. It was felt, however, that at times, candidates were trying to 'shoehorn in' comparisons that do not exist. For example, one examiner noted that a good number of candidates claimed a similarity in the way both texts start with an exciting, dramatic opening to show danger and tension, whereas the start of Text Two is actually quite calm with its methodical statements of facts.

At the top level, responses included astute analysis of settings, language, structure, purpose and tone. The range of comparisons, depth of comment on both ideas and perspectives and the use of appropriate references were all discriminators.

There are different ways to approach this question, but examiners noted that the most successful responses made each point a valid and appropriate comparison with supporting references from both extracts; this led to the balance required for marks within Levels 4 and 5. Feedback from

examiners suggested that use of references can still be variable. Some candidates use references within an almost entirely narrative response and offer no real comment, others select relevant quotations but then do little more than paraphrase them rather than offering any further explanation or expansion. More successful responses are able to select pertinent words within the lines being discussed, embed them effectively within their own sentences and, if looking at language features, offer some astute analysis. It is important to remember though that language and structure are only two of the possible elements that can be considered. Some candidates became side-tracked into exploring these features of each text separately at the expense of drawing out comparisons and some simply identified techniques used by both writers with no consideration of context or effect. One examiner observed that where candidates focused on the writers' use of language and structure, the most successful responses effectively linked these elements to the ideas and perspectives.

## **Section B**

Candidates are required to answer just one writing task but it carries half of the total marks available for the paper and so they must ensure that they allow sufficient time to plan and organise their response.

There are two assessment objectives for writing.

**AO4:** Communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences. (27 marks spread over five levels)

**AO5:** Write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. (18 marks spread over five levels)

## **Question 6**

This question asked candidates to write an article for a sports website expressing views on the statement 'Extreme sports may build confidence and discipline but they are dangerous and can encourage a selfish attitude.'

Examiners noted that the vast majority of candidates were able to write in an appropriate format and one examiner reported that 'the vast majority of the responses were relevant and cohesive'. There were some, however, who seemed uncertain about what exactly extreme sports are and looked at how certain people participate in sports to an extreme extent; others wrote about the advantages/disadvantages of taking part in sport generally.

Candidates approached the task in different ways but generally used the bullet points to help structure their response. It was noted that there were plenty of successful responses that 'took a lively, informal, personal tone' and most candidates examined both sides of the debate quite thoughtfully.

Less successful responses lacked clarity or were undeveloped, offering general statements such as 'extreme sports are hard and require a lot of effort'. Whilst at this level the idea that participating in extreme sports might lead to a selfish attitude was often not covered, where it was addressed candidates expressed thoughtful ideas such as training is often at the expense of family and friends or participants disregard the possibility of injury and the effect it could have on others. One

examiner stated that 'very able candidates could link this single-mindedness to professional contexts, suggesting that people who pursued extreme sports were a cut above in terms of being go-getters and resilient which was a transferable skill into other areas of life'. Another examiner was pleased to report that 'there were some well-organised and eloquently worded articles that developed relevant points and came to a satisfying conclusion'.

Spelling was generally very good, paragraphing reasonably secure but control of punctuation and syntax were often weaker features.

### **Question 7**

This task was the more popular of the two writing questions and invited candidates to write a speech giving views on the statement 'There are certain rules of behaviour that we should all try to follow in life.'

Candidates generally displayed sound awareness of the requirements of a speech and included many rhetorical devices leading to lively and interesting discussion. Successful candidates often found engaging and original ways of introducing the topic rather than the traditional 'I am here today to talk to you about...'

Lower level responses often listed or described rules of school or family with minimal expansion into behavioural rules that one might set oneself. At mid-level the rules suggested tended to include treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves, helping those less fortunate and being polite and respectful. At the higher-levels, candidates often engaged more subtly with *types* of rules, exploring the differences between ethics, morals and laws, for instance. Some pointed out that human civilisation is built on rules, either explicit, like laws, or socialised codes of conduct and considered the consequences of adherence and non-adherence to these. One examiner reported that at this level 'there were some powerful and thought-provoking responses'.

At the lower levels, responses tended to be either brief or rambling with no real sense of organisation, and contained errors in sentence structure and syntax that sometimes led to a lack of clarity and coherence. The best responses were ambitious in their selection of vocabulary and use of varied sentence structures, explored a wide and balanced range of ideas and made thoughtful and astute points.

### **Final feedback on the writing questions:**

To achieve the highest level in AO4, writing needs to be 'perceptive', 'subtle' and 'sophisticated' and there should be a clear focus on the appropriate form. For AO5, candidates should consider the ordering of their ideas, write in clear paragraphs and aim to link them effectively. There needs to be accuracy but also a 'strategic' use of an 'extensive vocabulary' and an assured and controlled use of a range of sentence structures 'to achieve particular effects'. Candidates should not avoid using an ambitious vocabulary because they fear making spelling errors. Those who did achieve higher-level marks frequently opened their piece with an intriguing question, a powerful statement or a short sentence and proceeded to explore and develop their ideas with fluency, clarity and enthusiasm. Candidates are advised that colloquialisms such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' should only be employed in direct speech. They should also avoid writing solely in upper case as this does not allow them to demonstrate an awareness of the correct use of capital letters.



Candidates must ensure that they do not rush the writing task, allowing time both to plan and to proof-read as unforced errors in grammar and spelling can lead to lower marks. Examiners commented that where there was evidence of planning, this often led to a clear and effective structure and greater textual cohesion and accuracy. Where responses were brief and undeveloped, it often seemed clear that candidates had not allowed sufficient time for the task.

Handwriting was raised as a cause for concern in some instances by examiners; it is essential that candidates try their best to ensure legibility and are supported by their centres to do so.

### **Concluding advice**

Candidates should:

- be provided with plenty of opportunities to practise reading and responding to unseen passages under timed conditions
- be aware of the different assessment objectives to ensure that they focus their answers specifically on the different question requirements
- highlight the relevant lines for Questions 1-3 in the Extracts Booklet
- use the number of marks available for Questions 2 and 3 to suggest how many clear and discrete points they should make
- not spend time analysing language in answers to Questions 1, 2 or 3
- answer Question 2, as far as possible, in their own words and aim to offer some interpretation
- provide interpretation of the text in Question 3 by not simply relying on quotations to make the points without comment
- underline or highlight the key words of Question 4 so that answers are appropriately focused
- consider the effects of language and structure features within the context of the given extract in Question 4 rather than offering generic explanations
- select appropriate references from the whole extract that fully support points made in answer to Question 4
- make a range of comparative points in Question 5 and link elements such as content, theme, tone, purpose, narrative voice, language; points should be balanced across both texts
- points in Question 5 should be supported with relevant quotations or close textual references; these should be selected carefully and some exploration of them should be attempted
- take time to make a brief plan for the higher tariff questions (5 and 6 or 7)
- give careful consideration to the given form and audience for the writing task and use these to inform register and tone
- try to use a wide vocabulary and varied sentence structures

- think carefully about how to engage the reader right at the start of a written response and consider how to end effectively
- aim for a structured, cohesive and complete piece of writing
- allow time to proof-read their writing response in order to achieve the highest possible degree of accuracy
- read all instructions carefully
- attempt every question
- take great care with handwriting

