

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

June 2011

International GCSE
English Language A (4EA0) Paper 03

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4EA0/03: Report 2011

Administration

The majority of centres carried out the administrative process in an admirably efficient manner. The majority of the administrative tasks were carried out competently with clearly explained front sheets outlining specific task details. There were, however, a number of problems which did recur.

Centres must supply top and bottom candidates if they are not already included in the sample; similarly, they should substitute another candidate for any candidate in the sample who has withdrawn.

Cover sheets should be attached to the work itself, and not provided separately.

The top copy of the OPTEMS should be sent to Hellaby, and not to the moderator.

Marks are now out of 80, not 40: a number of centres wrongly submitted all their marks out of 40.

The majority of folders had well-judged marginal annotations as well as detailed summative comments. These comments mainly linked to the appropriate criteria therefore making it easy to understand decisions on marks. Most centres, where there was obviously more than one marker, had indicated signs of internal moderation. Where a mark has been changed because of internal moderation processes, it is helpful if there is some explanation of the change.

Many centres failed to include the authentication sheets but these are mandatory. These can be found on the Edexcel website.

Reading

Responses to Section B of the Anthology included varied and interesting combinations and comparisons of texts. Some centres chose to focus on one poem or prose piece, whilst others based their questions on comparisons and contrasts between pieces, usually thematic ones. Either approach is, of course, acceptable, and there were some excellent essays which gave detailed internal comparisons, such as the soldier in 'Disabled' before and after the war. It is important that appropriate tasks are set: they should direct candidates to writers' techniques and not merely to content and ideas in the texts. A small number of centres gave no title at all, so that candidates could only respond by writing in a very general and undirected way.

Tasks which required candidates to write about characters in 'A Hero', for example, or to compare characters in two extracts, did not prompt candidates to examine writers' methods, and hence were limiting for the candidates. If the task had some development and asked for the writers'

own attitudes, or the ways in which they influenced readers', candidates then were required to look much more closely at authorial techniques. A task comparing female characters in 'The Necklace' and 'King Schahriar' might very well produce a descriptive account only, but a task which asked candidates to think how the structure of these stories affected the readers' responses should help candidates to achieve the higher band assessment criteria.

Many centres chose to focus on the theme of war, or the effects of war, by comparing 'The Last Night' to 'Disabled', or 'Refugee Blues'. This comparison was often quite securely handled, particularly if differences in genre were noted and discussed. It seemed that 'Refugee Blues' enabled candidates to write quite securely about form and structure, though there were several examples of chronological commentary which seemed to rely on similar points about the text. Some centres appear to compel their candidates to use a template, which is very often line by line exegesis and which does not allow the originality of interpretation which marks the highest bands.

Tone is often difficult for students to define and analyse, and these template answers were often misleading, with claims made about Frost's attitude to child labour, for example, which meant that the candidates could not explore the changes within the poem, and its wry ruefulness, because they were obliged to read it in one particular way. Thus opportunities to demonstrate their own interpretative and analytical skills were diminished.

Some centres appear to instruct their students to provide an opening paragraph of biographical or historical information, but this does not relate to the assessment objectives or marking criteria. Another problem was using the pieces as a starting point for a discussion of more general issues, so that, for example, Moniza Alvi's poem 'An Unknown Girl' was commented on, then the response moved on to the student's own experiences of feeling a stranger, or examining another culture. However, the assessment objectives relate to reading, not writing.

Some centres obviously allowed their candidates to choose their own combinations of texts, which certainly helps originality and freshness of response. However, the teacher generally needs to ensure that tasks specifically address the assessment criteria, ensuring that students can demonstrate analytical skills, as well as convincing interpretation. A task which offers a point of view about a text or texts could be useful in prompting candidates to consider and evaluate alternative readings.

Writing

The quality of writing and the knowledge and usage of sophisticated vocabulary, in the personal writing tasks was at times, superb. The 'explore, imagine, entertain' section was the most popular with some very empathetic creative pieces. Tasks which required candidates to add on an extra chapter to a novel did not always work well, and some responses were inappropriate in tone and content. Some candidates produced stories which

were very violent and narrative-driven. The lack of control of structure was noticeable in some work, with stories spanning many years in what appeared to be an arbitrary fashion. Attempts at genres such as science fiction were often not as successful because of the lack of purposeful and controlled shaping.

Autobiographical and personal writing was often powerfully expressed, with candidates making effective use of their own experiences, crafted and re-presented for the reader. There were examples of reflective and descriptive pieces which could be effectively accomplished, but at times were forced and over-written, with artificial metaphors and similes, and elaborate and ornate vocabulary. Sometimes less is more, and simplicity can work better than over-complexity of expression. The best work exhibited range and variety, but always showed evidence of shaping and crafting.

The 'argue, persuade, advise' section was less popular but there was good work here, with deliberately chosen language effectively used, and a strong sense of an intended readership. There were also touches of humour. Candidates did need to ensure that if they used information from other sources to support their arguments, they used it sparingly and purposefully integrated it into their own writing, rather than giving big chunks of information.

Some centres gave the same stimulus to all their candidates, whilst others allowed greater freedom of choice. Centres need to think about the relative strengths and weaknesses of all their candidates so that all are given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and creativity.

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