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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language (4EA1)

Paper 01R: Non-fiction Texts and Transactional  
Writing

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## Introduction

Following two successful November series in 2020 and 2021, the second opportunity to sit 4EA1 is moving to November and this was the final January series. The examination paper covered in this report is Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing which is sat by all candidates.

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 *Himalaya*, in which the writer, Michael Palin, describes how he and his colleagues meet Prince Malik and watch a bull race while filming a television series in Pakistan. The Anthology text was the extract from *A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat* by Emma Levine, in which she writes about a donkey race which she observed in Karachi. 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 a speech giving views on the topic of sports involving animals or an article for a magazine stating views on whether it is better to live in a city or the countryside. Candidates are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

The paper was well received with examiners commenting on how the unseen text matched well 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.

## 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 describe the bulls. There were a number of possible points on the mark scheme; all were chosen but those mostly commonly made were 'stocky' and 'short-legged'. Only a few chose the first bullet point and one candidate simply put the word 'crowd' which was not sufficient to gain the mark

The given line references for the question were 3-4 and very few candidates selected words or phrases from outside of these lines; those that did so picked out description of the bulls such as 'white' that came later in the text.

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.

## 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 24-33 and explain what we learn about Prince Malik. 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 or nearly marks; in particular they commented on Prince Malik's wealth, his love of the country and its sports (though some thought this entailed riding bulls rather than horses) and his persuasive, insistent approach.

Candidates need to follow the instruction '**In your own words**' and examiners did feel that a number were struggling to do so; this was where marks were most commonly lost with some candidates making only very minor adaptations to the text. 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 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. For example a statement such as 'The prince lives in a large white mansion' uses words from the text, is brief and does not offer any comment/interpretation so is unlikely to gain a mark. A better way to make the point would be to say: 'The prince appears to be wealthy as he lives in a big, grand house.'

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.

## 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 the bull race using lines 57-69.

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 while most candidates achieved at least 3 marks, with many achieving the full 5 marks, there were a few who did not base their answers on the correct part of the text. Successful candidates often worked methodically through the set section of the text identifying key points; the most commonly-made points were that the bulls were trying hard to avoid participating in the race, that they had to be forced to the line and that the race was clearly dangerous to both participants and spectators.

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. For example 'We learn that 'the animals are dragged unceremoniously to the starting line'' simply uses

the quotation to try and make the point but 'We learn that the bulls are extremely reluctant and have to be forced to the starting line as they are 'dragged unceremoniously'' offers some interpretation and shows understanding.

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, Emma Levine, uses language and structure to create a sense of excitement and danger.

This piece contains a number 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 most candidates, although examiners noted that candidates seemed more confident when making points on language. It was evident to examiners that most candidates had a secure knowledge of this text and could approach the question with confidence. However, there were certainly a few who did not seem very familiar with the extract, for example confusing the donkey race with the car race or writing as if the text ended with the sentence 'The race was over' which appeared at the bottom of the first page.

Examiners commented that the majority of responses offered some understanding of the extract. 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 candidates describing the events taking place rather than selecting relevant material. At this level, in addition to giving a straightforward narrative account of the text, there tended to be vague observations such as 'the writer compared the donkeys to other stuff'.

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. Where sound points about language were made, they often covered the hyperbolic use of 'eternity', the onomatopoeia in the list of sounds and the writer's use of the colloquial term 'lads'. Candidates who attempted to write about sentence, paragraph lengths sometimes struggled to move beyond generic statements. Examiners reported that candidates who used a PEE/PEA type structure to present their answer were often limited because the structure made it difficult for them to link and develop their ideas.

The most successful responses engaged with the text with real enthusiasm, delving into the effects of, for example, 'chaotic and dramatic imagery' and the 'semantic field of noise and possible discomfort'. Where candidates performed particularly well, they showed real insight and often examined critically the writer's westernised viewpoint as revealed through the use of the term 'Wacky Races' and the reference to 'Formula One without rules'. 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 ideas outside of the text; 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 'the vast majority of candidates had made a clear attempt to compare the two texts and there were some very thorough, detailed responses.'. 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 animal races (at times with confusion as to whether the animals in Text One were cows or bulls and in Text Two whether they were goats or donkeys) and both set in Pakistan 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. Some responses made a list of comparisons but often these went no further than a point followed by a quotation, for example 'they both include the word 'ditch' or 'they both include dialogue'. Such points, lacking development and explanation, are self-limiting.

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. One examiner commented: 'Where candidates performed well they made thoughtful and assured comparisons and explored the nuances of the texts.'

At the top level, responses included astute analysis of settings, language, structure, purpose and tone. One candidate opened strongly with a statement about how ‘the writers’ westernised ideologies ultimately influence their ideas on a foreign country, its culture and sports’, subsequently examining how this was demonstrated in both texts. 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 were 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. 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, asking candidates to write a speech for their peers on the statement ‘Sports involving animals are very popular around the world, but some people may feel that it is not acceptable to use animals in this way’, elicited a range of interesting and thoughtful responses which examiners enjoyed reading.

It was reported that generally responses showed a clear sense of purpose and audience and most had the sense of a speech, although some lacked rhetorical devices or deliberate attempts to engage the reader. An understanding of the conventions of the given form, as well as an awareness of audience, helps candidates to make appropriate language choices which will lead to apt register and tone.

Candidates approached the task in different ways but generally used the bullet points to help structure a cohesive response. Less successful responses tended to be narrow in scope and view or a long list of different sports involving animals. Examiners noted that some of these were not written in paragraphs and there was, occasionally, limited evidence of internal organisation.

In the mid-range, candidates offered clear opinions with some development. Quite a number wrote of their own experiences and opened with a brief personal anecdote which they then used as a springboard for answering the question, whilst others adopted a persona such as a jockey or an animal rights activist. Candidates must make every effort to stay focused on the task; a few drifted into the treatment of animals in circuses, zoos or scientific research and talked more generally about cruelty towards animals.

The most successful responses often looked at a range of arguments both for and against animals in sports, but there were also some which argued strongly for one side whilst mentioning the opposing line of thought in order to include rebuttal. There was evidence of thoughtful and mature approaches as one candidate stated early on before going on to expand and explore the issues: 'Due to my appreciation and love for animals, I can understand both viewpoints when it comes to animals in sport as, although I love watching some of these sports, the morals and ethics behind them are most definitely questionable.'

### **Question 7**

This task was the slightly more popular of the two writing questions and invited candidates to write an article for a magazine in response to the statement 'City or countryside: where is the better place to live?'

Most candidates aimed to give the sense of an article by using a heading and sub-headings to help structure their writing but these were often just the bullet points from the question and candidates did not always consider how best to link and develop ideas. Whilst some responses were a little pedestrian in style, others made good use of inclusive language ('we've all felt like that'), anecdote and lively sentence openers ('Picture this...').

Some responses were rather one-sided, for example one candidate announced at the start: 'In this article I will talk about the advantages of living in the city, then disadvantages of living in the countryside.' However, the majority aimed for a more balanced approach. Whilst some felt that city dwellers might suffer from over-crowding, pollution and high prices, many felt that city life is attractive to the younger generation, with its sense of vibrancy, inclusivity and 'busyness' suiting the 'loud and partying people'. Conversely, the countryside was often perceived to lack opportunities for shopping and entertainment but attractive to those 'who want peace and nature in their life' and where you retire for quiet, serenity and a feeling of community. Some less successful responses tended to make rather vague claims such as 'the countryside is nice and provides great stuff' but higher-achieving candidates were more forceful and persuasive: 'Escape that prison. Live in the countryside!'

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.



Examiners reported that there were 'some very lively, interesting articles, where candidates had clearly engaged with the subject and the task and developed their ideas fully and thoughtfully.' Whilst many candidates came to a clear conclusion about where is the best place to live, often based on their own experiences, others invited the reader to decide for themselves on the basis of age, personality or preference. As one candidate sagely advised: 'If you are looking to move to either the city or the countryside, use the CAL method to help you decide. C – Cost, A – Age, L – Lifestyle; with these principles in mind you are sure to make the best possible choice.'

### **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.

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; avoid simply giving an overview of the whole passage
- 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 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

