



# Examiners' Report

## Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In English Language (4EA1)

Paper 02: Poetry and Prose Texts and  
Imaginative Writing

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## Introduction

This report will provide exemplification of candidates' work, together with tips and comments, for Paper 2 of the Pearson Edexcel International GCSE Specification A in English Language. This was the final January series of the 'A' specification in IGCSE English Language 9-1. From 2023 the specification will be offered in June and November.

The specification consists of three components: Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing – 60% (examination); Unit 2: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing – 40% (this examination) OR Unit 3: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing – 40% (non-examination assessment). Candidates may also be entered for the optional Spoken Language Endorsement (non-examination assessment).

Unit 2 for Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing is assessed through an examination lasting one hour and thirty minutes. The total number of marks available is 60. The reading and writing sections on this paper are loosely linked by the theme of the text from the Anthology which appears on the examination paper.

This focus of this component is:

**Section A – Poetry and Prose Texts:** study and analyse selections from a range of fictional poetry and prose texts.

Candidates should study the poetry and prose provided in Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology* in preparation for responding to a given prose extract or poem in the examination.

The specification identifies that candidates 'should be able to read substantial pieces of writing (extended texts) that make significant demands on them in terms of content, structure and the quality of language. Throughout the qualification, candidates should develop the skills of inference and analysis.'

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section A, and there will be one essay question on a poetry or prose text from Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology*, which will be made available in a booklet in the examination if it is a longer extract or will be in the Question Paper in the case of a poem. Candidates will answer the question in this section and 30 marks are available. There are three bullet points to prompt the response and the third bullet always asks candidates to consider language and structure.

**Section B – Imaginative Writing:** explore and develop imaginative writing skills.

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section B. There are three writing tasks, to some extent linked by theme to the reading prose extract or poem. Candidates pick one question to respond to and the response is worth 30 marks. The format of the

tasks remains the same for each series – Question 1 follows the format ‘Write about a time when you, or someone you know...’, Question 2 follows the format ‘Write a story with the title...’ and Question 3 offers two images as a prompt for a response which is always ‘Write a story that begins...’ or ‘Write a story that ends...’.

The Assessment Objectives for this paper are:

### **Section A: Reading**

#### **AO1:**

- read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives

#### **AO2:**

- understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects.

### **Section B: Writing**

#### **AO4:**

- communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences

#### **AO5:**

- write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation.

It was clear that candidates were all able to respond to the short story from the Anthology in the examination, and that most had studied it before.

Throughout the qualification, overall candidates had been prepared well and all had, at different levels, developed the skills required to answer the questions.

It was also clear that candidates used what they had studied in their reading to feed into their imaginative writing, which inspired them. As the specification identifies, the main aims for our candidates in this paper are:

- read critically and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly, punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary alongside knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology, and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.

Candidates had, pleasingly, been given the opportunity to practise their writing techniques and planning and proofreading skills.

The responses of candidates had some positive features. Examiners were impressed by:

- evidence that many candidates had understood and engaged with the content of and ideas in the text, a longer text from the Anthology
- the successful, integrated use of the bullet points within the question and balance of coverage
- coverage of the assessment objectives required for this paper
- the range of ideas and creativity for AO4
- the attempt to vary vocabulary, punctuation and sentence structure for AO5
- writing that showed at least appropriate tone, style and register for audience and purpose.

Less successful responses:

- demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the full range of the text and/or included ideas in the story not relevant to the question
- rigidly followed the bullet points in the question so that language and structure points were almost an 'add-on' at the end
- had an insecure grasp of language and structure with a lack of understanding of how language and structure were used, feature-spotting or confusion of terms
- had limited comment on language and structure and relied heavily on description of the story or paraphrasing of it for Question 1
- failed to support points using appropriate textual evidence or used over-long quotations
- lacked organisation in their writing
- lacked accurate spelling and secure control of punctuation and grammar.

It was clear that candidates had been able to find at least some information about how the character was presented and could comment on language and structural features. Imaginative writing was often interesting, engaging and enthusiastic and had a clear sense of purpose and audience in the voice and ideas used.

Overall, examiners were very impressed with the performance of candidates and with the range of responses they saw. As Principal Examiner for this paper and Chief Examiner for the specification, it was a privilege to read such accomplished work and to see the engagement, interest and significant hard work in the responses candidates had completed.

## Question 1

The first two bullet points in the mark scheme relate to AO1 - read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives. The level of understanding of the text from the Anthology is assessed in the first bullet point, and the selection and interpretation of information, ideas and perspectives in the text in the second bullet point. Overall, candidates clearly engaged with the story. The bullet points were followed by the vast majority of candidates and helped them to focus on the question and manage their responses to cover the whole text.

At the very basic level candidates tended to comment very broadly on the features of the character. They were able to show some understanding, but the understanding and focus on the full range of the text was uneven. There was often limited selection and interpretation of information and ideas and much re-telling of the story.

The majority of responses at the mid-level had balance before the loss of the necklace and after, although some dwelt too long on the 'before' and ran out of time for the 'after'. Most commented on language and structure throughout, which was a more successful approach, embedding AO2. Most responses picked out examples showing the character as ungrateful, greedy or selfish, with reference and some explanation. Most responses showed the change in the character before and after and picked out some examples, such as working hard, living in an attic, giving up the maid. This, in tandem with 'before' points allowed candidates to access Level 3 and above. Most candidates made points about language and most tried with structure, mainly focusing on the rule of three, juxtaposition and contrast. Some candidates offered their personal opinion on her plight, judging her harshly.

The best responses explored the character's vanity and her manipulation of her husband - as one put it succinctly, 'swapped tears for calculation'. Some successfully saw and explored the difference between Madame Loisel's dreams and reality. One examiner noted:

'The most successful responses tended to be more focused on the story as a text, which has a writer who had made deliberate choices.'

Many candidates identified the negative way in which the character is presented by Guy de Maupassant, showing their understanding of the writer at work. Most candidates at Level 4 and above explored the way in which the apartment is described, juxtaposing this with Madame Loisel's psychological state and how she yearned for a different life. Common devices identified were adverbs, listing, rule of three, similes and sentence types. Students at this level often explored the shift in her relationship with her husband and where the control was in their marriage.

Many high-level responses went beyond character studies and were able to integrate the way the character was presented with the nature of the character, for example, showing how the writer allows Madame Loisel to judge others, through words like 'junior' and 'minor' to further emphasise the moral of the story after the necklace has

been lost. These responses tended to offer more integration and went beyond the 'PEE' structure through their wider engagement with the question.

More personalised interpretations were:

- 'Loisel is an old French word for bird often used as a nickname for a flighty person which could mirror Mathilde's character – fanciful and frivolous'
- 'The irony of "this was torture to her" contrasting with the real torture she went through after the loss of the necklace'
- 'In the end she has risen above her selfishness and grief about the things she didn't have'
- '...portrayed as a victim of 'Fate' – this clever capitalisation of the abstract noun fate to be envisaged as if it were purposely, vindictively manipulating Madame Loisel's life...for the reader to perceive her as a victim'
- 'Madame Loisel suffered because she did not tell the truth. At the end she does and is set free'
- 'After the loss of the necklace she shows an emotional maturity which came by having to work'.

One examiner commented:

'It was a pleasure to read nuanced responses which deservedly were given full marks.'

## **Examiner Comments:**

### **Writing**

For this part of the assessment, the vast majority of candidates focused their writing on the question, thus achieving the sense of purpose bullet point in the mark scheme (bullet point 2) in Level 2 and above. Likewise, the vast majority of candidates tried to show evidence of crafting either in lengths of sentences or varying sentence starters. It was pleasing to see evidence of crafting, editing and proofreading through crossing out, for example where 'a man' was replaced by 'a tall muscular man'. Most candidates tried to at least introduce a question or exclamation to vary sentence structure and punctuation used, and ellipsis was also used in some. Most candidates demonstrated evidence they were trying to vary vocabulary, even if it meant a misspelling. Use of 'rule of three' was often used: 'writhing, wriggling wretched things' for example, also with alliteration.

The least successful responses were fairly basic, with straightforward use of tone, style and register and audience and purpose not always clear. At this level candidates tended to express but not always connect ideas and information, with limited use of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing.

In the best responses, candidates tended to have subtle use of tone, style and register, managing ideas and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose. At the higher levels candidates tended to manage, but not always manipulate, ideas and information, with a range of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. Responses at the highest levels had some creative ideas and conscious, successful crafting. At the top end of the mark scheme careful choice of vocabulary was evident and was more subtle, for example 'insects had nestled into the moss she had carpeted the shelter with.'

The assessment objectives for these tasks effectively discriminated the quality of responses. Advice to centres would be to encourage candidates to avoid thinking they need to write a whole novel or even a short story in the time available – they need to have a clear organisation and direction in mind, and to perhaps not 'over-season' the pieces with vocabulary and syntax.

Varying sentence structure and punctuation were evident, for example, varying the way sentences begin; more use of subordinate clauses to begin complex sentences; effective use of one-word sentences and one-sentence paragraphs to demonstrate conscious crafting. Some candidates attempted to use ambitious vocabulary while some seemed to steer away from ambitious vocabulary in order to maintain accuracy. This was a common weakness running through all but the very best responses. The less successful responses were formulaic, showing a lack of organisation and often demonstrated a lack of planning and direction. There was some excellent description and evidence of crafting at all levels.



In terms of register it was clear that the majority of the candidates knew how to write an imaginative piece. Examiners noted that lack of control could let candidates down and that control of language and handwriting was also a problem at times.

**Question 2: Write about a time when you, or someone you know, had to work very hard.**

This was the more popular of the writing questions and a large number of candidates wrote very touching responses about the way in which they have observed the work ethic of their parents, grandparents or other family member. There were a number of responses where students created a first-person narrative, projecting their character into the future and writing retrospectively about how hard they had worked for their IGCSEs. There were a number of military-style essays, suggesting battles or wars won through hard work.

One examiner noted the range of ideas included, as well as hard work in terms of school, work or sport:

'The imagination of candidates never ceases to amaze me...a couple used the passage as a basis to pay off a debt. Recovery from an illness and life in general appeared ('life is a tippy curvy road'). A slave working on a plantation. A parachute jump that goes wrong when a shoulder pops and the work that entailed. Dragons working hard to survive a storm. This included some delightful descriptive touches: the first light of dawn bringing life to the landscape below me. A mum working 3 jobs to put food on the table. OCD explored to show how trying to do every day things was hard work: daily tasks became chores, minuscule movements became exhausting: 'It controls me like a puppet.'

There were some responses at the lower end that over-used dialogue and the narrative became 'he said, she said', often losing a sense of audience and purpose. This style of response tended to use simplistic vocabulary and lacked a range of devices.

Higher level responses showed more ambition and, those that had taken the approach of writing about a family member tended to use description, which allowed them to use more literary devices and use them with subtlety, creating a real sense of 'person'.

Examiners noted the style used in some responses:

'There were some lovely openings: There was something pleasant in the nature of yard work. Actually, most candidates across the questions tried to hook the reader. Lovely original touches of description: 'it made even his practised arms ache''

### **Question 3: Write a story with the title 'A Surprise Invitation'.**

Examiners noted that this question had the greatest range in terms of written quality, with responses seen in Levels 2-5 for both Assessment Objectives.

The majority of responses either revealed the invitation at the start or at the end of their story. A wide range of different parties and job invitations were seen, but there were some individual responses where the invitation had been more inward-looking, for example the invitation to be 'more true to yourself and to not give in to peer pressure'. There were some who responded to an invitation to a holiday and some who, interestingly, had refused an invitation, taking a moral standpoint on the invitation being offered. Overall, this was the question that appeared to elicit the most diverse range of responses.

There were some responses that used flashback effectively for this question. There were some interesting reflective responses that used this as a way of looking at the impact the invitation had had on their character.

Candidates need to ensure their response is meeting the purpose and the needs of the audience. One examiner noted:

'There were some war stories and use of military language and this did not always fit well with the question. Some of these read as if they were 'learned' responses that had just been tweaked at the end, for example 'and that was the surprise invitation'. Sadly, these often lacked real engagement with the question.'

There were responses that appeared real and some that appeared imagined, and both worked well. The discriminator was the way in which language had been employed with subtlety and how the candidate had manipulated the reader.

Lower-level responses tended to take a chronological approach, with, for example, the invitation arriving and the wedding attended. Higher-level responses tended to offer a sophisticated response. There were many with a 'twist in the tale' or these often used complex ideas in a subtle way.

**Question 4: Look at the images provided. Write a story that ends 'I danced all night'.**

This was the most popular writing question, and examiners felt that the quality of written communication was the highest in this question with an abundance of controlled figurative language and descriptive language. It was felt that candidates really enjoyed this question and responded very well to the images.

There were many candidates who used this title well to include a range of emotions, scene-setting and description, employing a wide range of both linguistic and structural features. There were some straightforward narratives that appeared to also have taken some inspiration from Question 3 and combined an invitation with the story ending with 'I danced all night'.

At the top end of the mark scheme, the quality of writing was compelling in some of the responses, with an acute sense of detail and manipulation of language. Devices tended to be controlled and subtle. Candidates had clearly been taught how to use the senses when describing and there was some very clever, but not contrived, sense of place and atmosphere. Some lower-level responses had also used this approach, but these tended to be very 'heavily seasoned' with adjectives and the responses tended to read like a list rather than a well-crafted narrative.

Some took a (perhaps more obvious) approach of going to a party, but there was a wide range of ideas that also moved from an introvert dancing alone because that filled them with joy to someone dancing all night because of the death of a family member who was no longer suffering.

## Summary

Based on their performance on the paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure you have studied the poetry and prose texts in the Anthology fully and use the examination time to remind yourself of the text, not re-read it.
- Read the question carefully and make sure you are answering **this** question, not telling the examiner what you know about the text you have studied. The selection needs to be relevant to the question you are being asked, in this case how the writer presents the character of Madame Loisel.
- For AO2 (language and structure), make sure you are offering ideas about how language and structure are used. Many of you were able to give examples, but sometimes you did not offer points about how the examples were used.
- For AO2 try to cover points on both language and structure, commenting on the different techniques that have been used by the writer and how they link to the overall topic of the question, in this case how the writer presents the character of Madame Loisel.
- When you are writing, always think about your reader, what information and ideas you want to develop and how you want the reader to react at different parts of your writing; then choose the best words, phrases or techniques available to you to achieve those effects.
- Think carefully about how you will begin to write so that it is engaging for your reader from the very start.
- As you begin to write, know where you will end. This will help you to write in a manner that is cohesive and coherent for your reader.
- Take care throughout with accuracy: spelling, punctuation and grammar
- In writing, focus on crafting and organisation, whatever the nature of the task.
- Be ambitious in your structure, vocabulary and range of ideas and try to be creative and original. We are often incredibly impressed with your creativity and ability to write in such an imaginative way in the time given.
- Always respond to the questions set, not a question you have prepared – this does not often lead to effective responses.

