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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In English Language (4EA1)

Paper 02R: 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 2R 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 prose extract 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 prose text
- 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:

- simply revisited the content of the text
- 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 text 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 writer created tension 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 extract and the tension within it.

At the very basic level candidates tended to comment very broadly on the weather and opening of the extract and its link to tension. They were able to show some understanding, but the understanding and focus on the full text was uneven. In some cases it appeared that some candidates were unfamiliar with the text. Less successful responses also tended to be incomplete or to use the opening sections of the extract only, thus providing a much-reduced coverage of the available material.

The majority of responses at the mid-level had some balance and covered the opening, the mysterious events and the broken torch. Many commented on language and structure throughout, which was a more successful approach, embedding AO2. Candidates who wrote an introductory paragraph outlining the main features of the 'gothic genre' in the text provided themselves with a clear focus and sound basis for the selection of appropriate material. They discussed many ideas, for example the gothic and fearsome atmosphere, the foreshadowing of a tragic event, supernatural elements, the subconscious, the sinister and yet invisible presence, vulnerability, the narrator's battle with fear and anxiety and the panic and confusion being felt.

The best responses explored discussed the rational nature of the narrator, the way he tries to rationalise events but eventually loses all his serenity and even questions his own reality. Some examined the false sense of calm in his reasoning and how seemed at first to be solid and rational, then succumbs to the situation, the cry, the unseen presence and his imagination. The child, and more specifically the cry, was seen in the best responses to act as a catalyst for the narrator's mental decline, while whatever else is in the house has clearly weakened the narrator's thought process and mental will. Some interesting ideas noted by examiners were:

- 'the extract is from an era where visits from spirits and supernatural happenings seemed not only possible but frighteningly probable.'
- 'Despite his logic and rational thinking, this man's vulnerability paints him as a scared child.'

One candidate began with an exploration of the title, which suggested that Spider held a great significance to the protagonist, giving him the comfort he needs, while many saw Spider as a 'steadfast companion, a construct of comfort' and how this increased tension as is a necessity.

Many candidates seemed very comfortable with and often knowledgeable in AO2. A number of responses provided pages of detail, identifying features such as short sentences, rhetorical questions, hyphens, italics, single word sentences, repetition,

simile and metaphor, using brief quotations and sometimes adding even briefer comment. The brevity of comment in these responses meant that the responses seldom moved out of Level 2 and generally failed to achieve the explanation required by Level 3 or the exploration for Level 4.

In the less successful responses, candidates were unable to use their knowledge of language and structure to their advantage. Some candidates adopted a narrative approach, without sufficient reference to the demands of the question, writing at considerable length but needing less narrative/description and more focus on comment/explanation/exploration of the creation of tension.

For AO2, most successful responses were able to comment and show understanding of the structure of the text, illustrating how the narrator changed his view and the techniques used by the author to show this. The best responses were able to track the changes in the narrator's outlook by contrasting and highlighting his attitude.

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. 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.

The least successful responses were fairly basic and sometimes incomplete, 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, one examiner noted use of *miniscule*, *malignant*, *hypnotised*, *mesmerising*, *harrowing*, *despondent*, *adherence*, *atrocious* and *pulchritudinous*.

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 was evident. Some candidates attempted to use ambitious vocabulary while some seemed to steer away from ambitious vocabulary in order to maintain accuracy. A key message to centres is to focus on crafting, organisation and handwriting whatever the nature of the task. The less successful responses were formulaic, showing a lack of organisation and often demonstrated a lack of planning and direction. There was some strong description and evidence of crafting.

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, felt unsure about something.

There were a variety of ideas covered, however, examiners did note that in some instances, it was difficult to see what the candidate was unsure about. Some responses had a rather unambitious basis, as in 'unsure of the way to get home', while others were rather more developed, as with the result of an Oxford application, a piano competition, a clarinet Grade 8 test or always doubting anything involving her skills.

Higher level responses showed more ambition and evidence of crafting, as with one that started 'I am not sure about this. I think this is a bad idea'. Others chose to end on a 'cliffhanger', so we did not find out the result of the Oxford application.

Question 3: Write a story with the title 'The Best of Friends'.

Examiners noted that several of these responses were incomplete, with one consisting of no more than an opening paragraph, and one of an opening sentence.

Most candidates seemed to find the concept of a 'best friend' gave them ideas to work with, with most best friends established in primary school and some the result of a chance meeting in later life.

Question 4: Look at the images provided. Write a story that begins 'I saw it at the top of the stairs ...'.

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.

One examiner noted:

'Many, of course, were extremely gruesome, with shadow figures having many eyes/colours (mainly red) and limbs, causing unpleasant experiences for the characters involved.'

The stairs in some cases were described in effective detail, with one examiner noting the example:

'Oh these stairs that could have ascended to Hell. Broken. Black. Bloodstained. Baked in darkness and death.'

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 tries to create tension.
- 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 creates tension.
- 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.

