

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

International GCSE English Language
(4EA0) Paper 1

Level 1/Level 2 Edexcel Certificate in
English Language (KEA0) Paper 1

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Publications Code UG035881

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Introduction

This specification continues to grow in popularity and has seen entries for June 2013 almost double those of the previous summer. The additional take-up comes from both international and home centres.

For those who are new to, or who are considering this specification, there are three sections in the exam paper, equally weighted.

- In Section A, students are tested on reading and are asked to read an unseen non-fiction passage.
- Section B part 1 tests reading as students answer a single question about one of the Anthology texts that have been studied in class. In part 2 of section B students complete a shorter writing task that is thematically linked to the Anthology passage used in part 1.
- Section C is a longer writing task consisting of a single question that tests writing to inform, explain and describe.

The paper contains no choices of task for students and so rubric infringements are rare. The overall quality of response has been maintained from the previous year. With three equally weighted sections of 45 minutes each, a common problem to warn centres of is one of time management. Some students do not use the mark tariff effectively and do not adhere to the suggested timings, spending too little time on Section C and producing writing that is below their true potential.

Section A: Reading

Q1-4

The passage studied in Section A was adapted from *A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople - From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube* by Patrick Leigh Fermor. The passage is from the start of the journey and describes the author's departure from London and arrival in Holland. The passage proved to be accessible to almost all students, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension.

Q1 was a single mark question and asked students to say how many friends go with the writer in the taxi to say goodbye. There was only one correct answer and most students scored well on this question.

Q2 asked students to give three comparisons that the writer uses to describe the weather and the markscheme identified six to choose from. This produced a full range of responses. Most were able to recognise the use of simile in, 'Trafalgar Square fountains twirled like mops' but fewer recognised the use of metaphor in, 'veils of rain' or, 'the drowning cathedral.'

Q3 asked students to explain the writer's feelings on his departure from London, using their own words. There were four marks available with the mark scheme identifying seven possible responses. Most students identified feelings of excitement and sadness, but better answers also identified his feelings of uncertainty about when he may return or his sense of doing something momentous.

The key discriminator in Section A is the higher mark tariff Q4 and its focus on the writer's technique. In this instance students were asked to focus upon how the writer tries to engage the reader in the ways he describes his journey so far. Bullet points offered further support for structuring an answer around his experiences in London, his experiences in Holland and his use of language.

Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as the wet weather in London. Less successful responses sometimes retold the story chronologically without referring to the overall question of how the writer engaged the reader; some tended to focus on the writer's feelings rather than how the reader is engaged and so tended to repeat parts of their answer to Q2. In the weaker responses students often struggled to find relevant text to comment upon or sometimes included quotation but were unable to comment or explain in any way that linked to the wording of the question.

More able students covered all bullet points with some aplomb, comparing the pathetic fallacy of the weather with the contrasting mood of the narrator either side of the channel. Better responses explored the metaphors such as 'submarine arcade', recognised the use of direct speech to open the extract and the many direct contrasts between the English and Dutch settings. Better answers recognised the manner in which the passage is structured with a strong contrast from the crowded and rainy bustle of London to the empty and pristine silence of Holland. These answers also drew links between the cheery taxi driver and the helpful café owner.

In terms of language, some answers indulged in feature spotting and the naming of techniques, but did not always use these insights to develop a coherent response to the question. Better answers were those that used apt and carefully chosen textual references to demonstrate skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and which were directly focused on the question. The wording of the question is clear in that, 'You may include brief quotations from the passage to support your answer', and that this is not a requirement. However it is true to say that better answers often use key quotations as a support to structure their response to the question, and this is an approach that can be recommended to centres.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Q5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the *International GCSE and Certificate Anthology, The Explorer's Daughter*, and focused upon how the writer shows the conflict in her thoughts and feelings about hunting.

As a prepared text almost all students seemed to have reasonable knowledge of the text. Some students referred to one side of the conflict much more than the other but almost all students were aware of the conflict in the writer's mind.

Weaker responses sometimes presented narrative that did not focus upon the question, or did not have sufficient range. One phrase that proved extremely popular with students was, '... In that split second my heart leapt for both hunter and narwhal'. To many this encapsulated the writer's thoughts and feelings about hunting and provided the basis of a sound exploration of conflict.

Stronger responses were those that were able to detail a wide range of her thoughts and feelings and recognised how the sentence structure of the final paragraph is used to carefully lay out opposing points of view and the final sentence with its use of a very strong qualifier, 'absolute necessity' gives the writer's final thoughts.

Q6

The writing task in Section B is intended to be thematically linked to the reading task in Section B. In this paper students were asked to write a letter to their local newspaper giving their views on the proposal that all forms of hunting should be banned. The title was accessible to almost all students and many focused on hunting in the Arctic as their starting point.

Some students argued very convincingly in favour of hunting, using evidence from history, tradition, culture, social need and recreation as reasons for retaining hunting whilst others were equally as passionate in being opposed to it. A number focused on the exploitation of endangered species for often trivial reasons and demonstrated a wider understanding of the issues than just fox and badger hunting.

Some responses were very one-sided and persuasive, whilst others offered a balanced view of the issues. In the context of the question, both responses were equally valid.

The weakest responses were often incomplete, communicating at a basic level that showed little awareness of the reader. Vocabulary and punctuation were

impressive in a number of responses although weaker answers lacked a range of sentence types and seldom used paragraphing for effect. The best responses wrote with a skilful command of language and technique that showed a sophisticated control of technique for deliberate effect.

Section C: Writing

Q7

This question asked students to describe an important decision that they had made and to explain what happened as a result. Further support was offered through bullet points. This question proved to be accessible to most students.

Many chose to write about making options choices for GCSEs but it also produced some very poignant responses: animals being put to sleep, having to choose whether to live with mum or dad, and moving house, school and country.

Once again timing seemed to be an issue for some students, not giving sufficient time to Section C, which is worth one third of the marks for this paper. As a result, weaker responses were often brief and tended to be limited in their ability to clearly describe the choices they had made and to express their thoughts and feelings. Such answers often failed to make effective use of the bullet pointed list, intended to help students. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure. They also tended to focus on the autobiographical detail without fully appreciating or demonstrating the requirement for linguistic and structural control.

In contrast more able responses were able to demonstrate an understanding of how to create and sustain a piece of writing that addressed the question and which demonstrated a high level of accuracy combined with sophisticated control of expression and structure.

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