Pearson

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel IGCSE
In English Language (4EA0) Paper 03

edexcel

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2017
Publications Code 4EA0_03_1706_ER

4EAO3 June 2017 Report

Principal Moderators' Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel English GCSE 4EAO3

Introduction

This unit is based on two assignments, one Reading and one Writing. The Reading assignment is a response to Section B of the Edexcel Anthology, with the texts chosen by centres. Students may write about any number of texts from this selection, though the majority write about one or two. The Writing assignment can be on any topic, and any genre. All tasks are chosen by the centre. Word length is not prescribed.

Administration

Generally, the administration was excellent. With a few minor exceptions the work arrived on time and was appropriately packaged. Almost all centres sent the coursework authentication sheets and the coursework front sheets, and these were usually filled out correctly. Centres should send the selected candidates, along with the top and bottom folders if not already included, and there was a substantial minority of centres which failed to send these. If a candidate has been selected but has withdrawn from the unit, a substitute folder should be provided. It was most helpful where centres identified the top and bottom candidates. It also significantly reduces the time if the front sheets are placed at the front rather than the coursework authentication sheets.

The folders should be attached by staples or treasury tags, not plastic envelopes or paper clips. Sometimes centres send loose sheets which inevitably causes problems for the moderation process. It is best to avoid using cardboard folders for individual candidates.

All the marks should be on the front sheets: the mark for Reading, two separate marks for the Writing, and the totals. There were quite a number of errors in the adding up of marks, and in transferring marks from the work to the front sheet. Another error which occurred was when centres altered a mark during the internal moderation process but not transferring it to the frontsheet. At times there were marks crossed out on the front sheet which made it difficult to determine what the final mark actually was. Centres should discourage handwritten pieces which really do not help the students to present their work properly, and put students at a disadvantage since they cannot make changes in the same way as those who type their work.

Reading

It was good to see a range of Reading assignments and tasks from more centres this year, thus allowing candidates to write more to their individual

strengths. Some centres, however, covered a very narrow range of texts. Usually there were questions on two or three texts, individually or combined for comparison, but in some cases it seemed that only one text had been taught, and only one task set. This led to a batch of very similar essays, with similar points and textual references being made by all the candidates. It is very difficult for students to give an original, personal response in these circumstances. The assessment criteria for the highest band refers to 'originality of analysis and interpretation when evaluating texts' which these essays seemingly written to a template, or at least driven by the teacher's own interpretation and selections from the text, can never achieve. 'Disabled' was by far and away the most popular text. Quite frequently, students drew on a small group of pieces centring on 'Disabled' and including 'Last Night', 'Out, Out--' and 'Refugee Blues'. Many coursework titles tended to be rather broad, focusing on a general analysis of the poem instead of a specific thematic or character focus: these less focused titles were often less successful. In some centres there was no given task at all, or one such as 'An analysis of...' Specific comparison is still being used too frequently as a task; the more able candidate can often cope with this, but less able candidates simply jump about from text to text finding supposed differences – the boy is actually dead, whereas the soldier is just disabled, for example, on Frost and Owen. Some students compared a poem and prose extract by pointing out that the poem rhymed and the prose did not, the poem had a rhythm and the prose did not and so on. In a few centres, students attempted to compare three or more texts and this really is a challenging exercise if it is to be anything other than listing similar and different aspects. It is important to bear in mind that comparison can be within the text, and does not necessarily require cross-references between texts. There was a tendency in some centres to offer very broad titles, inviting candidates to find their own points of comparison by asking them simply to write 'A comparison of...' but this was almost always unhelpful to the candidates. Making comparison the main focus of the response often leads to truncated analysis with points not developed or extended because the student moves immediately to the other text.

It has been noted in previous reports that students often do not make any reference to different genres when comparing a poem and prose piece. There was some misunderstanding of 'Last Night' including the belief that it was a short story (and, in one or two cases, that it was written by Charlotte Gray). Genre differences can be a very productive way of writing about texts because of the focus on the writers' use of different conventions and techniques. It can be particularly useful in examining form and structure which students often find very difficult. Since there was sometimes a lack of detailed analysis in the work of even the most able candidates, a task which specifically targets the writer's methods might be more useful than a more general one. An exploration of how a writer evokes pity, or sympathy, or tension, or humour places an analysis of techniques as central to the discussion.

There did seem to be a move to tasks which limit student response by focusing on a minor feature. "Consider the portrayal of men and women in 'The Last Night'" 'or "How is death portrayed in 'Veronica'?" are two examples. There also seems to be an idea in some centres that what the

student has read can be used to illustrate some broader theme such as the effect on an individual of disability or the rise to power of Hitler; this theme is then assiduously researched and much evidence is offered but very little close reference is made to the texts and especially not to the language and structure of the piece.

A number of centres offered 'context' in the form of historical or biographical details as the introduction to reading responses. Such centres seemed to be working to a formula – 'begin with context.' In many centres, the context was simply a separate and largely irrelevant paragraph, often almost identically worded in each folder. When the context was then integrated into the response - for example, how the experiences of Owen can be seen in the realism of his poem - the contexts added to the quality of the response. The context which illuminates the text can help the student to interpret the text, but only if the student understands the relevance and significance of the contextual information and applies it as part of their own original interpretation. Several responses on 'Disabled' began with an account of Owen's time in Craiglockhart Hospital and his relationship with Sassoon, but this was then left as the response moved on to a discussion of the poem. Introductory comments on the fame of de Maupassant, for example, do not help students to form their own reading of his short story. In a number of centres, there were contextual comments that were factually incorrect – that Owen was writing after the war ended, that America was fighting in World War 1 when Frost wrote 'Out, Out--', that Frost was writing about Puritans, that he had had to flee England to avoid conscription.

Writing

There is a great deal of freedom allowed to the centres in this assignment, and the best results came from those centres who offered a range of tasks to their students. The writing section should be one where independence and creativity is allowed to flourish, and the impression was that this element of coursework was quite restricted in many centres. There seemed to be too many centres that had one title for every single one of their students, regardless of their students' particular strengths and interests. Where students did produce independent work, it usually resulted in something engaging at the very least, and something utterly compelling and enthralling in some instances. Overwhelmingly popular were short stories, or narratives of some kind. Some tasks were based on the work of other writers, though this was not always made clear. There were a few examples of work written as a continuation of a novel or short story, but these were often unhelpful for the students. Many students were able to adopt and sustain a voice, or handle shifts between points of view as well as shifts of time which gave good evidence of their ability to craft and structure their writing. There was some excellent descriptive writing and compelling short stories and pieces of personal writing, but in some centres the default position seemed to be gore and horror. Very many pieces included one death, or several, and there were examples of the narrator dying at the end, raising the usual questions of how he or she managed to tell the story. There was, unfortunately, no lack of the dispiriting 'It was all a dream' ending. A number of students handled the fantasy genre with some freshness and originality, but it tended to lead to very long and derivative

pieces of writing. One kind of writing that has increasingly emerged as a strength is the piece that is presented from the point of view of a created character, giving a snapshot of their life, or exploring a particular angle. There were several examples of this in the current submission, and they were effective and assured pieces for the most part. This year there were a number of 'rants' where students were given a provocative opening statement such as 'What I hate about...' followed by engaged persuasive writing. On the whole these worked well, especially as they were more individual and personal.

Where candidates were able to draw on their own experiences, or on topics of particular interest, travel writing, for instance, it was often the case that they could describe those experiences in convincing detail. Candidates' knowledge and experience did sometimes distract in persuasive pieces, however: candidates sometimes forgot that they were arguing a case, because they were too busy supplying information about a particular topic. There were still a lot of Writing tasks with no title or indication of what the task was. If a piece is based on a novel or a poem, or some stimulus, centres should provide this to help the moderator understand exactly what the purpose and context of the piece was. Some centres allowed or encouraged their students to produce inordinately long assignments for both assignments: 12 sides for the reading assignment and the same for the writing at one centre. It does not do the students any good as the work easily becomes rambling and repetitive and loses focus; some of the best work seen by moderators was relatively brief and focused, addressing the tasks succinctly without sacrificing detail. Some centres interpreted the assessment criteria for Writing rather generously, seeing crafting and cohesion for which there was little evidence and overlooking many flaws of expression. There was a tendency in a number of centres to place work in Band 4 when the assessment criteria would point to Band 3.

Annotation:

The quality of annotation varied from centre to centre. There were some examples of excellent practice, where centres used marginal notes and summative comments informed by the assessment criteria. In those cases it was possible to identify and follow the reasoning of the centre in order to determine how accurate the centre was in applying the criteria. Many centres supported that logic with a process of peer and department-level standardisation. In such places moderation was straightforward, and more importantly the centres tended to be accurate in their marks. In other places the centres left the candidates' work blank, or, equally unhelpful, annotated only with random-seeming ticks. In some cases ticks were used so frequently they partly obscured the work. Also unhelpful were words such as 'Good', 'Well done' or 'Much better' intended to encourage and motivate the candidates. The annotations submitted with the work are for the moderator who needs to understand the reasons for the marks awarded. In some centres there was a clear mismatch between the comments and the marks, so it was difficult to perceive why the final mark had been chosen. There was much evidence of internal standardisation but it is less helpful when it is simply a changed mark, initialled, or a laconic comment such as 'better than this'. The more evidence the moderator has

to support the centre's marks the better. The most helpful centres are annotating quite fully and giving summative comments which show what they think the candidate has achieved in terms of the assessment objectives.

Assessment

Across the centres assessment was largely accurate across the range, but some moderators noted a tendency to generosity in the marking of Reading assignments. In the main, this was confined to centres where only limited evidence could be found of internal standardisation taking place. The generosity tended to be placed in Bands 5, 6 and 7, where description and explanation was over-rewarded as analysis.
Reading and writing have, of course, separate criteria. However, even when they know they are assessing reading rather than writing, many teachers point out punctuation errors or a poorly constructed sentence but few draw attention to it in the summative comment on Reading so they probably are not giving it weight in the marking. Occasionally, however, two marks were supplied for the Reading assignment.

Conclusion

The majority of centres submitted impeccably presented folders with correct administration.
The level of students' engagement with the tasks was often impressive, and teachers' comments showed their understanding and application of the assessment criteria. As in previous years, moderators made it clear that they found the task of moderating these folders rewarding and interesting. Centres and students are to be congratulated for their hard work and commitment.

Margaret Walker, July 2017

Pearson Education Limited. Registered company number 872828
with its registered office at 80 Strand, London, WC2R 0RL, United Kingdom