



Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
In English Language A (4EA1)

Paper 01: Non-fiction Texts and  
Transactional Writing

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## Introduction

January 2019 saw the first January series of the new International GCSE English Language Specification A and this examination paper 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 *Adventures of a Young Naturalist* by David Attenborough and tells of the writer's visit to South America in the 1950s to find animals to take back to London Zoo. The Anthology text was the extract from *The Explorer's Daughter* by Kari Herbert in which she gives an account of an Inughuit hunt for narwhal in Greenland. 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 magazine article about the advantages and disadvantages of zoos or a review of an exciting or interesting event. Candidates are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

The paper was well received with examiners commenting on how the unseen text was accessible to students of all abilities and provided ample material for the comparison question. It was clear that many candidates engaged well with both texts and were able to make a good number of comparative points ranging from those that were very straightforward to more subtle points about form and perspective.

There was evidence that most candidates had been well-prepared for the examination with nearly all of them at least attempting every question but they should be reminded to read all the printed instructions on the examination paper very carefully and follow them precisely.

## 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 described the people. There were a number of possible choices and the most popular were 'shouting' and 'crowd'. Where candidates missed out on marks, it was because they chose a phrase that did not specifically describe the people, for example, 'crowded streets' or because they selected a word or

phrase that did not appear within lines 8-11, for example, 'squatted on the banks which is in line 12. There were a few candidates who appeared to think that they needed to use own words for their answer and offered adjectives such as 'loud' and 'enthusiastic' which did show understanding of what the people were like but could not, unfortunately, be credited as they were not words from the text.

Some candidates added in analysis of the words selected but this is not a skill that is assessed in Question 1 and is therefore not good use of time.

## Question 2

This is a 4 mark question that requires candidates to interpret information, ideas and perspectives. For this examination they were asked to describe how the crowd reacts to the attempted capture of the manatee, using lines 23-33. There were a number of possible responses to this question and many candidates achieved full or nearly full marks by working through the given lines and clearly describing the actions and emotions of the people. The adjectives 'amazed', 'excited' and 'eager' were often appropriately used. Other popular details included the fact that they ignored Narian's warnings about his net in favour of speed and were 'noisy/loud' throughout.

Candidates need to follow the instruction '**In your own words**' and it was often the case that where candidates did not achieve full marks it was because they had copied large amounts of the text; it is important to remember that candidates need to demonstrate the ability to select and retrieve information. The mark scheme cannot cover all the ways in which candidates might respond or the words that they might use and therefore offers some suggestions as to the way in which points might be made.

Whilst it might be possible to gain four marks by making fewer than four points if they are well-developed, the most successful approach for candidates is to make four clear and distinct points. However, it is important to remember that this question asks for a description and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at length, it is not acceptable to simply bullet point answers and the response must be written in full and complete sentences that clearly show understanding and secure interpretation. A few candidates did not achieve full marks because they provided an overview of the 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 explain what we, as readers, learn about Narian, using lines 41-51. In question 3, candidates are told that they 'may support' their points 'with **brief** quotations' and many did so to good effect.

Whilst it may be possible to achieve full marks for question 3 without making five distinct points, dependent on the quality and depth of the answer, many candidates

adopted the successful approach of making five clear points written in full and complete sentences and supported by relevant brief quotations. There is no need for comments on the language used in the quotations and examiners noted that a number of candidates spent time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which they could not here be credited.

Most candidates gained full or nearly full marks and most picked up on Narian's annoyance, supported by the evidence that he was 'grumbling loudly' and cross with the 'mad men'. Strong answers went on to look at his skill, his determination and triumph when he achieved the capture. Weaker answers made only a couple of points or failed to focus on the question and offered points that related to other parts of the text. Some candidates moved away from the topic to offer their own perspectives on the issues raised in the extract, for example, whether animals should be taken in this way to be transported thousands of miles to a zoo, but this was not a requirement of the question and therefore meant that they could not be rewarded. A few candidates had misread the question to be what we learn *from* Narian and so made suggestions such as that we should be patient and persevere but this only offered some implied notion of Narian's character.

The best answers used a good balance of short quotation and explanation, paying attention to how many marks the question is worth and making five clear and distinct points.

#### **Question 4**

This question will always be 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 5 levels.

In this examination, candidates were asked how the writer, Kari Herbert, uses language and structure in the extract from *The Explorer's Daughter* to show her thoughts and feelings about watching the hunt. This piece contains a wide range 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 candidate's 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 nearly all candidates.

Examiners commented that nearly all of the responses they saw offered at the least a clear understanding of the text and one examiner noted that this was 'generally a well-answered question'. Some candidates still spent a little too long on an introduction that set out what they intended to do and a conclusion that summed up what they had done, neither of which contributed usefully to the acquisition of marks and time could have been spent more wisely by starting with an immediate focus on the use of language or structure.

At level 2, candidates were able to select quotations and use subject terminology but sometimes this led to little more than feature spotting with some comment on the generic effect of techniques such as 'short sentences create impact' or 'this encourages the reader to read on' rather than considering the effect within this particular text. Mid-level responses offered sound explanation of the text with points supported by relevant quotations. Examiners noted that a number of candidates did not focus sufficiently on the thoughts and feelings of the writer but worked methodically through the passage without selecting what was most relevant to the question. Some considered not only the writer's thoughts and feelings but also those of the hunters, their families and the narwhals themselves. One examiner stated that 'Whilst some of these were interesting to read, almost all would have benefited from a tighter, deeper, more developed focus on the task as set.'

A good number of candidates explored language by selecting details of the opening description, the most popular being 'glittering kingdom' and 'butter-gold', 'plumes of spray', 'spectral play of colour' and 'mischievous tricks of the shifting light', commenting on the effects of the visual imagery. One high-achieving candidate wrote: 'The author gives the narwhal mystical properties, likening their movements in the water to 'mischievous tricks of the shifting light' and this emphasises their other-worldly beauty.' At the lower level, candidates might make a comment about the writer's language choice, for example, 'The writer uses emotive language' but then give as evidence a quotation that did not support the statement, for example 'methodically passing each other by.'

Most recognised the conflict of the writer's thoughts and feelings about the hunt and commented on the dilemma she faced between wanting the narwhal to escape and the hunters to survive and could support this with appropriate quotations such as '- in that split second my heart leapt for both hunter and narwhal' and '...my heart also urged the narwhal to dive, to leave, to survive' with strong answers skilfully analysing both the language and structural elements contained within them. Many picked up on the different types of language employed by the writer but whilst some could do no more than state that factual or 'expert terminology' had been used, others made the perceptive point that this structural distancing from the drama of the hunt reflects the writer's attempt to distance herself emotionally.

The mark grid does make reference to sentence structure at level 3 and above as a feature that could be written about but it is important to remember there are many other elements of structure that students could choose to analyse. Stronger candidates were able to discuss structure in depth, for example, referring to paragraph lengths, the juxtaposition of ideas within and between them and their purpose and effect on the reader. Comments such as 'The hunter then 'gently' picks up his harpoon and this juxtaposition also further emphasises the juxtaposition between the beauty of the animal and the ruthlessness of its killing' showed an astute awareness of the author's crafting.

With reference to structure it is worthwhile noting that, as one examiner pointed out, extracts in the Anthology are often adapted versions of the original text and the ellipsis that is present may simply be editorial and not of greater significance than to indicate that the original writing has been redacted.

Most candidates looked at the passage as a whole and understood the writer's feelings, at the very least, on a straightforward level. Some were a little confused by the question in the final paragraph ("How can you possibly eat seal?"), wrongly identifying it as a rhetorical question that the writer herself was asking. Many commented on the final simple sentence as a 'summing-up' of the writer's thoughts on the subject with one high-level candidate pronouncing that 'This short sentence gives a blunt end to the dilemma and emphasises her final opinion.'

### 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 5 levels, carries almost half of the total marks available for reading so it is extremely important that candidates allow time to plan carefully and then aim to make a good range of relevant points.

Examiners recognise the challenge of the question and it was pleasing to note that nearly all candidates achieved some degree of success. One examiner commented that 'the majority of candidates experienced no difficulty in accessing the unseen extract and most were able to find some points of connection between the two' with another stating 'most answers achieved some comparisons, however straightforward.'

At the lower end, candidates tended to make obvious comparisons for example 'both extracts are about a hunt for sea mammals' and 'one animal is captured for entertainment and one for the people's survival' and often these responses became narrative sometimes with greater emphasis on one text. Candidates at this level were, however, generally able to draw links between the writers' ideas and make some straightforward comments about language and/or structure. Candidates should note that the picture that accompanies Text One is there to provide a visual aid to them but is not a feature of the extract itself that needs to be commented on.

More assured responses included astute analysis of language and structural features but also considered the different tones and purposes of the pieces for example: 'The tone of Text One is light and seemingly inconsequential, contrasting the serious tone of Text Two in which the survival of these people depends on their success'. These candidates were also able to look at the writers' perspectives and there were insightful statements about how, although both writers are observers, use of the first person in

Text Two adds to the drama and draws the reader in with phrases such as ‘my heart leapt’ whereas in Text One the writer, and perhaps by extension the reader, is more detached as he only expresses brief concern ‘that she had been injured’. Some candidates picked up on the time when Text One was set and commented on how there is now a greater awareness of issues of animal welfare. One examiner stated that a good example of the difference between level 2 and higher level responses could be seen in comments about spectators: ‘The fact that both texts featured an interested set of spectators could be said to be an ‘obvious comparison’ whereas an understanding that the women in text Two were observers concerned for their relatives’ physical well-being whilst the spectators in Text One became enthusiastic but incompetent participants showed a deeper understanding.’ For a top-level answer this could be further developed with a link to tone. 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 again 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.

## **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 5 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 5 levels).

## **Question 6**

This was the more popular of the two questions set with one examiner reporting that ‘all candidates were given the opportunity to respond here, many with real engagement’ and another stating that ‘candidates attempted this question with enthusiasm and many answers showed real crafting’.

The fact that the question’s bullet points mentioned advantages and disadvantages of zoos provided many candidates with a straightforward framework for organisation and many used the given opposing statements as the starting points for their arguments. The most successful responses were fully persuasive in their presentation of ideas with one examiner praising the ‘excellent teaching of persuasive features’.



Another examiner's experience was that 'almost without exception, candidates showed a clear sense of purpose and the tone and style of the responses was exactly as expected for the task.'

Many candidates acknowledged the given form of the writing by using a carefully-considered headline: 'Boos for zoos'; 'Zoos or no Zoos- that is the question'; 'Caged Creatures?'; 'Home or Hell?' Many responses then opened powerfully with a question to the reader or a strong statement; less successful answers were more obvious 'I'm writing this article to inform you about...'. One high-level answer, showing a clear sense of audience, informed the reader that 'I decided to go on an important self-discovery to find out not just for myself, but for avid readers of this magazine, whether zoos are a safe haven or prisons.' Many sensitively considered both sides of the argument with points in favour of zoos including the educational aspect; the protection of endangered species; the safety from hunters/poachers; the fact that few people would be able to view the animals in their natural habitat and points against covering poor conditions; lack of space; boredom leading to stress; removal from natural habitat; removal from family; lack of freedom. Many candidates referred to their own experiences of visiting zoos and it was interesting for examiners to read about the experience of zoos in different countries.

It was clear to examiners that where candidates had made a brief plan for their writing this improved their writing and ensured that there was no repetition of ideas or digression from the main point. In general, paragraphing and punctuation proved mainly accurate but there were some issues with vocabulary and spelling.

### **Question 7**

Whilst fewer candidates opted for this question, it did elicit some very interesting and varied answers and examiners enjoyed the fact that they never knew quite what to expect as responses covered such diverse events as an outdoor production of 'Romeo and Juliet'; an art exhibition; an all-night vigil organised by and attended by congregations from local churches; music festivals; and, perhaps more predictably, various sporting fixtures. Some answers made use of the candidates' cultural heritage, for example, a memorable Diwali and 'A White Party' in Pakistan.

A review should offer some kind of judgement and informed opinion. Weaker responses tended to be narrative and sometimes far too long was spent on the rather dull preliminaries to the main event. As one examiner stated: 'Responses which focused on specific aspects or moments in the event were generally more successful than those which felt the need to cover the whole event from the queuing up to the packing away.' Some candidates gave a star rating to their chosen event which worked well as a starting point for their views and some proffered advice as to how it might have been more successful: 'The food offered could have been more varied; there was little suitable for vegetarians.' One review of a hunting experience in Uganda demonstrated a clear and appropriate register when concluding with 'I recommend this trip for

seasoned hunters, as it is very exciting but if you are a new hunter, this trip is still possible.' A top level review of an art exhibition opened intriguingly with 'Mysterious. A word that can describe everything about Giorgione da Castelfranco' and went on to explore in detail the attractions of 'this world-class exhibition'.

Final comment on the writing questions:

To achieve the highest level in AO5, writing needs to be 'perceptive', 'subtle' and 'sophisticated' and for AO6 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. Whilst there were some excellent responses, ambitious in scope and skilled in execution, weaker pieces of writing tended to be brief and unparagraphed answers that had limited development of ideas, did little to interest the reader and struggled with clarity of expression and technical accuracy. Some examiners felt that a few candidates went into the exam with a pre-planned idea of what they would write about and did so, with little reference to the set task; this is never going to be a successful approach.

## 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
- answer Question 2, as far as possible, in their own words
- 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 quoted in Questions 1, 2 or 3
- 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 and supported with relevant quotations or textual references
- take time to make a brief plan for the higher tariff questions (5 and 6 or 7)
- consider 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
- 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