



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

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

Paper 01: Non-fiction Texts and
Transactional Writing

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 *Harvey reporters cast aside role as observers to help* by David Bauder in which the writer describes how various reporters helped rescue victims of the floods caused by Hurricane Harvey in 2017. The Anthology text was the extract from *A Passage to Africa* in which George Alagiah describes his thoughts about what he witnessed as a reporter in war-torn Somalia. 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 letter of application for a job as a trainee reporter on a newspaper or an article for a website competition entitled 'The person who has had the greatest influence on me.' 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 fully with both texts and responded with interest and enthusiasm.

There was evidence that most candidates had been well-prepared for the examination with most of them 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 showed how reporters helped people in danger. There were a number of possible choices and the most popular were 'lifted people into boats' and 'flagged down rescuers'. A few candidates offered 'set aside their roles as observers' but this could not be credited as it did not show specifically how the

reporters helped. Where other candidates missed out on marks, it was often because they had chosen a word or phrase that did not appear within lines 1-5, for example, 'guided residents out of a flooded house' which is in line 10. Some candidates simply copied out the whole of the given lines and could not be awarded any marks as no selection of relevant material had been made.

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 reporters assisted people, using lines 7-28. 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 ways in which the different reporters helped such as David Begnaud escorting people out of a house submerged by the floods, Jim Cantore passing on advice to leave homes and Mike Bettes carrying a distressed baby.

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 the question asks for a description and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at length, it is not acceptable to 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 whole 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 the attitudes of Ed Lavandera and Matt Finn, using lines 53-70. 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 small number of candidates spent time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which they could not here be credited.

There were a number of possible points that could be made and most candidates gained at least 3 marks. One examiner commented that 'better responses focused on the reporters' modesty and humility as well as them being kind and caring.' Where candidates did not achieve higher marks, it was because they had made only a couple of points or failed to focus on the question and offered points that related to other parts of the text or they simply related what the reporters did rather than what their actions showed about their attitudes. Some candidates moved away from the topic to offer their own perspectives on the issues raised in the extract but this was not a requirement of the question and therefore meant that they could not be rewarded. Some candidates expected long quotations to act as a substitute for their own understanding and commentary but answers including overlong quotations rarely gained full marks.

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 distinctive 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, George Alagiah, uses language and structure in the extract from *A Passage to Africa* to show his reactions to the people he encounters in Somalia. 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 candidates 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.

Some candidates spent 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 the lowest level there were just a few candidates to whom the Anthology text seemed unfamiliar but examiners commented that nearly all of the responses they saw offered at the least a clear understanding of the text. 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 writer's reactions to the people but worked methodically through the passage (often spending too long on the opening paragraphs which have little about the people) without selecting what was most relevant to the question.

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 responses showed a more subtle awareness of the writer's reactions and there was some clear focus on the effect of the man who smiled with some candidates highlighting the impact of the one sentence paragraph 'And then there was the face I will never forget.' Other elements of structure that candidates chose to analyse included the use of the rhetorical question 'how could it be?' showing the writer's 'disbelief of seeing someone smiling when he is living in the conditions that Alagiah is graphically describing for the reader'.

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.

Many candidates picked up on the use of 'graphic language' used when describing the state and situation of some of the people. Whilst most candidates were able to support this with apt quotations, weaker answers left their statements about language unsubstantiated. Stronger answers went on to look at how this imagery is used to 'shock the reader' and some then linked this to the way in which the writer says such sights 'no longer impressed us much.' Examiners commented that higher level answers 'looked at the ideas of 'pity' and 'revulsion' separately' and traced the writer's developing thoughts throughout the piece. Some considered how the powerful final sentence, which addresses the 'nameless friend' directly, leaves a lasting impression of the writer's regret at not knowing the man's name and gratitude, thus picking up on the more subtle reactions of the writer that not many candidates recognised.

Question 5

This question provides the only assessment in the specification of **A03**: 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 'most candidates were able to offer some valid comparisons' and another 'was impressed with the quality of these responses.'

At the lower end, candidates tended to make obvious comparisons for example 'both extracts are about reporters' and 'both are about visiting people who are in need of help' 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, tone and purpose as well as content. These candidates were also able to look at the writers' perspectives, for example the view of reporters (positive in Text One, more critical in Text Two) and purpose and there were insightful statements such as 'The purpose of Text Two is to inform the reader of the writer's encounters and to make the world aware of the people's horrible state and think about their own reactions. Similarly, Text One informs the reader of the reporter's brave actions, also motivates people to step in to help others.' Some picked up on the very personal and reflective nature of Text Two and compared it to the more detached tone of Text One. 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 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

Whilst fewer candidates opted for this question, it elicited some lively and engaging high-level responses. Candidates used a full range of persuasive techniques aimed at encouraging the newspaper editor to appoint them and many embraced the opportunity to expound on their personal strengths: 'confidence, a calm nature, a good speaker and a team player.' There was careful and thoughtful consideration of what reporting might entail with one candidate stating, 'Moreover, the best aspect of reporting for me is the ability to meet with influential people and learn from them. This would help you become a better, wiser and more aware person.' A range of rhetorical features, for example anaphora, were used very effectively: 'I want to emphasise how much this job would mean to me. If that means waking up at five o'clock in the morning, I would! If that means making people's drinks to start off with, I would!' In the following example list of three has been used successfully 'One must be able to persuade, entice and excite the reader on whatever topic necessary.' There was often a lightness of touch to these letters that made them very enjoyable to read and examiners were certainly convinced by the sincerity and appeal of a good number of these letters.

Most letters started off with an appropriate salutation but some candidates did seem to forget to sign off at the end. A few appeared to have only read the first part of the instructions and wrote a letter of application for a job of their choice which meant that their ideas were not particularly appropriate.

Question 7

This question was more popular than question 6 and students wrote in praise of a range of influential people. The most common choices were, perhaps rather predictably, a mother or father but candidates also wrote about siblings, influential teachers and celebrities. Whilst most candidates achieved level 3 for both AOs, some were rather pedestrian in approach ('That one person who has influenced me in my life is my older sister...') or presented a straightforward biography. Some candidates struggled to access the higher levels because they did not cover complex ideas.

More successful answers considered effective ways of opening and took a broader view of their chosen person's influence, for example, one high-level response that gave a powerful account of Malala Yousafzai's influence on the writer began with: 'The most common problem faced by some countries is gender inequality and the right to education for women.' Responses that reached levels 4 and 5 did not simply focus on the subject's life history or qualities but also explored the ways in which the writer had benefited from their chosen person's influence. One candidate writing about a teacher employed a carefully-crafted sentence to sum up her mentor's influence: 'If it wasn't for her, I would still be an insecure rabbit that hides in her burrow and if it wasn't for her, I

wouldn't be able to stand in front of a crowd and talk confidently and if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be so open-minded.' One examiner appreciated the clever humour and satirical tone of a candidate who felt strongly that he was the most important influence in his own life and another examiner wrote how she 'really enjoys hearing the responses of our international students.'

Students generally had no problem in adopting an appropriate tone and register. Where responses were weaker, there was a limited range of ideas. Spelling was often sound but errors in sentence structure and syntax often led to a lack of clarity and coherence.

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. Those who did achieve higher level marks frequently opened their piece with an intriguing question, a powerful statement or a short sentence and proceeded to explore and develop their ideas with fluency, clarity and enthusiasm.

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