Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

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

Paper 01: Non-fiction Texts and Transactional Writing

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Introduction

This was the second summer examination of the new specification in English Language 9-1 and the entry had increased substantially from summer 2018. The specification consists of three components: Paper 1: Non-fiction Texts and Transactional Writing – 60% (this examination); Paper 2: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing- 40% (examination) or Paper 3: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing- 40% (coursework). There is also an optional Spoken Language Endorsement (non-examination assessment).

Non-fiction Texts and Transactional Writing is assessed through an examination lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes with a total of 90 marks. The paper is organised into two sections each worth 45 marks.

Section A: Non-fiction

This section is worth a total of 45 marks, tests reading skills and is based on an unseen passage (Questions 1-3) and a text from the International GCSE English Anthology (Question 4) with a total word count across the two extracts of approximately 2000 words. Question 5 asks candidates to compare the two texts.

In this series, the unseen extract was adapted from *Once upon a time in the East: A story of growing up!* by Xiaolu Guo, an autobiographical account in which the writer describes meeting her parents for the first time. The Anthology text was the extract from *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter* by Adeline Yen Mah in which she describes a rare visit home.

Candidates are advised to spend about 1 hour and 30 minutes on this section.

Section B: Transactional Writing

This section, 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 speech expressing views on the statement 'Nowadays there should be no difference in the ways that boys and girls are raised and educated' (Question 6) or a magazine article with the title 'My hopes and ambitions for the future (Question 7).

Candidates are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

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 (Question 1, Question 2, and Question 3)

AO2:

> Understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects (Question 4)

AO3:

> Explore links and connections between writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed (Question 5)

Section B: Writing

AO4:

> Communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences (Question 6 or Question 7)

AO5:

> Write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation (Question 6 or Question 7)

This is an untiered specification and the choice of texts and questions set are such that all candidates are able to access the paper and to show their abilities in reading and writing. Most of the candidates sitting the paper in this series responded positively to all questions.

It was clear that candidates were all able to show some understanding of the ideas in the unseen text which examiners felt 'proved engaging' to candidates and which offered a wide range of obvious and more subtle comparisons with the anthology text that had been studied. Candidates had been prepared well and all had, at varying levels acquired and developed the skills of interpretation and analysis.

Question 1 (AO1)

This question, which tests the skills of selection and retrieval, is intended to serve as a straightforward way into the paper and build confidence on the part of the candidates, almost all of whom were able to gain the two marks by selecting two relevant words or phrases that describe the woman.

The important advice for this question is to look at the line references given and to select words or phrases from the passage, not to attempt to use own words and not to spend time giving comment or explanation which cannot be rewarded here.

On the few occasions where both marks were not achieved, this was because candidates had selected material from outside the line references or had copied the

lines in their entirety. There were a number of possible answers, the most popular of which were 'much shorter' and 'bore a stern expression' but candidates do need to select thoughtfully e.g. 'looked me up and down' was acceptable but 'looked' on its own was not.

Question 2 (AO1)

This question moves on from Question 1 by directing candidates towards a larger section of the text. Nearly all candidates achieved the full four marks for this question, which tests the skills of retrieval and interpretation and requires candidates to use their own words as far as possible.

For this examination, they were asked to describe the walk to the bus station using lines 36-43. There were a number of possible responses to this question and most candidates gained full or nearly full marks by working through the given lines and clearly describing appropriate features of the walk such as the grandmother going with the family, the slow pace, the uneven narrow paths, the fact that the grandmother proudly introduced her son but appeared to ignore her daughter-in-law.

The most successful approach to this question is to make four clear and distinct points and one examiner noted that some candidates 'presented their response very efficiently with each point set out separately'. It is important to remember that the question in this instance asked for 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. Supporting quotations are not required for this question.

Where candidates did not achieve full marks it was because they copied extensively from the text, gave a general overview with limited focus on the question or used material from outside the given line references.

Question 3 (AO1)

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 how the writer feels about leaving her life in Shitang using lines 52-64. In Question 3, candidates are told that they 'may support' their points 'with **brief** quotations' and many did so to good effect.

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 and which sometimes led to them making only two or three rewardable points.

The majority of candidates gained full or nearly full marks, but where this was not the case 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. Some candidates moved away from the question to offer their own opinions on what it must be like to leave a familiar home but this was not a requirement of the question, and therefore, meant that they could not be rewarded. At the lower end of achievement, candidates tended to repeat points, e.g. that the writer was 'upset' rather than searching for a range of different emotions such as fear, grief, trepidation, apprehension, nostalgia etc. A few responses switched focus to the feelings of the grandmother, which could gain no marks.

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. Some candidates selected relevant short quotations but expected these on their own to make the point. The best answers used a good balance of short quotation and explanation, and paying attention to how many marks the question is worth, made five clear points. As with Question 2, setting these out separately can assist the candidate to check how many points they have made and signals to the examiner that there are five discrete points.

Question 4 (AO2)

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 uses language and structure in the extract from *Chinese Cinderella* to present her relationships with her family and other people. 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.

It was evident to examiners that most candidates had a secure knowledge of this text and could approach the question with confidence. 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. Some candidates used an additional

answer sheet which should not be necessary if they start with an immediate focus on the use of language and structure.

Examiners felt that centres 'are doing a good job of preparing candidates' and commented that 'many candidates answered this very well', noting that nearly all of the responses they saw offered at the least a clear understanding of the text. Examiners were also pleased to note that this year there appeared to be very few candidates who simply identified techniques or gave very generic comments about their effect. There were also hardly any candidates who answered on Text One instead of Text Two.

At the lower levels, candidates described and made general comments on the text with, at times, limited focus on the question, often drifting into narrative. Mid-level candidates tended to work through the article methodically, made a sound range of points and selected apt textual references for support but often did not move on to analyse closely the impact or connotations of individual words and phrases or fully consider the effect of the structural features. At this level also there was sometimes a narrow focus on the writer's relationship with her father and other characters such as school friends, the chauffeur, the teacher, siblings and step-mother were not referenced.

The most successful responses engaged with the text with real enthusiasm, looked at the relationships holistically and provided some astute and perceptive analysis. One examiner felt that centres 'had obviously heeded the advice of the last Examiners' Report as there were illuminating comments on how the text was structured, e.g. the length of sentences in the dialogue at the end of the text and what this meant symbolically for the father/daughter relationship'. Other examiners were impressed by candidates' perceptive comments on pathetic fallacy and the possible symbolism inherent in the game of Monopoly at the start of the passage. At this level, candidates were discriminating in their use of quotations, linking different parts of the text

There is no requirement for any comparison with Text Two in this question.

Question 5 (AO3)

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 rose to this and managed to make links at some level between the

two texts which offered a wide range of possible areas of comparison. It is clear that candidates are generally being well-prepared for the task, with one examiner noting that 'the vast majority of candidates dealt with the skill of comparison very well, finding common links to discuss across both texts'.

At the lower end, candidates sometimes wrote more about one text than the other or tended to make obvious points of similarity, for example 'both extracts are about Chinese girls and their families' or 'both are first person accounts'. Often these responses became narrative in approach or focused on very few ideas. Some candidates wrote about each text separately with little clear comparison, but most at this level were able to draw some connections between the writers' ideas with a degree of success and make some straightforward comments about language and/or structure; there were very few indeed who only wrote about one text.

At mid-level some candidates were able to find quite a wide range of comparisons but did not explore them sufficiently, whereas others were able to offer some exploration but did not provide more than three points of comparison.

Examiners were pleased to read many very assured responses that gained marks within the higher levels; these included astute analysis of language and structural features and the most successful also noted the differences in perspective and tone.

There are different ways to approach this question but examiners noted that the most successful responses made a good range of appropriate, developed and thoughtful comparisons with supporting references from both extracts; this led to the balance required for marks within levels 4 and 5.

Question 6 (AOs 4&5)

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, the speech, proved to be the more popular writing task with two thirds of the candidates opting to answer it. On the whole, it was answered very successfully, producing some engaging writing and one examiner stated that 'whatever their ability, candidates seemed to have something interesting and appropriate to write about and there were some highly opinionated and passionate responses'.

Examiners felt that this topic of gender equality was one about which candidates were very knowledgeable. At the lower end, candidates tended to reference their own experiences and state straightforward opinions, but the best answers took a wider view on the topic, considering historic and current attitudes. One examiner commented that 'international candidates also often considered the differences between educational systems across the globe, which made for very interesting marking'.

Most candidates understood the need for their writing to read as a speech and started with appropriate introductions and many used a range of linguistic techniques such as rhetorical questions, statistics and anecdotes to engage the listener. In general, the speeches were well-crafted, but at the lower end there was sometimes a lack of paragraphs. One examiner remarked that 'the more successful speeches were sharper and used humour to convey their ideas to parents, teachers and carers and remembered the audience demographic in their choice of language and use of register'.

Question 7

Whilst not as many candidates chose this question, it was also felt to be very accessible and one examiner said: 'I was pleased to mark such thoughtful and inspiring responses.'

At the lower end, candidates focused, sometimes exclusively, on their own personal hopes and ambitions, often revolving around academic or sporting success, but examiners noted that many used the bullet points to structure their responses to good effect. The most successful answers showed some evidence of planning, and often these candidates considered how their own hopes and ambitions linked to those they had for the world. These latter were often very admirable and covered such ideas as how we can help the environment, reduce poverty and inequalities in society and 'stop stigmatising people with mental illness.'

At the higher levels of achievement, one examiner noted how 'there were some very impressive and considered pieces of writing that would have fitted in a professional magazine' and one candidate confidently asserted that theirs was 'a motivational article to those who read it'.

Most candidates seemed familiar with the conventions of the article format and employed them skilfully to develop what were quite frequently complex ideas. Examiners saw some ambitious use of vocabulary across a wide range of responses.

Summary

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Be aware of the different assessment objectives to ensure that you focus your answers specifically on the varying question requirements.

- Answer Question 2 in your own words as far as possible; do not copy out large chunks of the text.

- Use quotations to support, rather than make, points for Question 3 and ensure that you offer some explanation of the points in your own words.

- Do not spend time analysing language quoted in Question 3.

- Do not waste time on a general introduction or conclusion in Question 4 – every sentence should be earning marks and consider the effects of language and structure features **within the context** of the given extract in this question.

- Ensure that you focus on the question and do not just provide a general overview of the texts in Questions 4 and 5.

- Make a range of comparative points in Question 5: link similar elements such as content, theme, tone, purpose, narrative voice, and language and support points with relevant quotations or textual references.

- Take time to make a brief plan for the higher tariff questions (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 range of vocabulary and varied sentence structures. Aim for a structured, cohesive and complete piece of writing. Allow time to proof-read in order to achieve the highest possible degree of accuracy.

- Read all instructions carefully and attempt every question.