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Examiners' Report  
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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
In English Language A (4EA1)  
Paper 1R: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing

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## Introduction

January 2020 saw the second January series of the International GCSE English Language Specification 4EA1 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 *Indian Relay: Magical racing in the mountains* by Matt Majendie, in which the writer gives an account of the sport of Indian Relay which is played by Native American tribes. The Anthology text was the extract from *A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat*, in which Emma Levine writes about a donkey race which she observed in Karachi, Pakistan. 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 to a newspaper in response to an article about competitive sport or a guide on road safety aimed at teenagers. Candidates are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

The paper was well received with examiners noting that the unseen text was accessible to students of all abilities and provided a good range of material for the comparison question. 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 the majority of them attempting every question but they should be reminded of the necessity 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 most candidates were able to select two apt words or phrases that described an Indian Relay race. There were a number of possible choices and all were chosen quite evenly.

The given line references for the question were 4-6 but a significant minority of candidates did not achieve the full 2 marks because they selected words or

phrases from outside these lines, most commonly from the first 3 lines which they had perhaps anticipated would be the focus for the question, for example 'magical'.

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.

## Question 2

This is a 4 mark question that requires candidates to interpret information, ideas and perspectives. For this examination they were asked to explain what we learn about Kendall Old Horn in lines 10-22. There were a number of possible responses to this question and most candidates achieved full or nearly full marks by working through the given lines and making a number of clear points. Many considered how Kendall Old Horn was experienced and enthused by the racing. A few misread or misinterpreted parts of the section and thought that Kendall Old Horn was the race itself rather than a person.

Candidates need to follow the instruction '**In your own words**' and in this series examiners felt that candidates had been generally well-prepared and did this quite successfully. There were a few who included some analysis of language and structure, an AO2 skill that cannot here be rewarded, but on the whole this did not prevent them from making several relevant points which could be credited.

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 an explanation and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at length, it is not acceptable to bullet point very brief points and the response should 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 describe the documentary film made by Charles Dye, using lines 32-55. In question 3, candidates are told that they 'may support' their points 'with **brief** quotations' and many did so to good effect. Some candidates quoted at length and expected these to act as a substitute for their own understanding and commentary but answers including overlong quotations rarely gained full marks.

Many candidates adopted the very successful approach of making five clear points, sometimes set out separately on the page, 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 whilst examiners noted that fewer candidates were doing so, a small number did spend valuable time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which again, as with question 2, they could not here be credited.

There were a number of possible points that could be made and most candidates scored 4 or 5 marks. A few candidates did not achieve many marks because they made only a couple of points or failed to focus on the question and did not comment on the documentary and offered points that related to other parts of the text.

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

#### **Question 4**

This question is 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, Emma Levine, uses language and structure in the extract from *A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat* to present Yaqoob and Iqbal. 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 most candidates.

Examiners noted that this question was 'generally answered well with candidates showing at least a sound understanding of the text'. Most candidates achieved a mark within level 3 or above; at the lowest level there were just a few candidates to whom the Anthology text seemed unfamiliar. 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 however, that quite a number of candidates did not focus sufficiently on Yaqoob and Iqbal but rather gave a general overview of the extract or wrote more about Levine and her reaction to the race. Whilst it may be very useful to use Sample Assessment Material and past exam papers for practice, candidates need to be reminded that the focus of the question on a particular text will vary and they should underline or highlight the key words

to ensure that they keep on task. One useful mnemonic that was noticed written on a script was **Relate To The Question** and this proved to be a useful reminder! It is important to note that there is no specified number of points that a candidate is required to make and that for the higher levels they need to be exploring and analysing features which may lead to fewer points but a demonstration of a greater depth of understanding.

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 subtle and astute understanding of how language and structure points can be interlinked with one candidate stating that: 'Levine uses direct speech to present Iqbal's demeanour as calm and steady, By employing a modal verb, 'should', he is presented as an advisor rather than a commander'.

Some impressive answers did not deal with the two 'lads' as one unit but as different personalities, with one candidate noting how Yaqoob's driving is 'reckless, yet precise' and Iqbal is 'shown to be more cautious when faced with chaos'. Some candidates also demonstrated a subtle awareness of the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western perspectives.

### **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 'all candidates who answered the question could describe a range of similarities and differences between the texts' and another said that some responses in the top level were 'truly impressive'. The majority of candidates achieved a mark within level 3 or above but there were a few who did not attempt the question and thereby missed the opportunity to gain a significant number of marks.

At the lower end, candidates tended to make obvious comparisons for example 'both extracts describe an unusual and dangerous sport' and 'one race takes place in Pakistan and one in America'; often these responses became narrative, sometimes with greater emphasis on one text. Candidates at this level were generally able to draw links between the writers' ideas and make some

straightforward comments about language and/or structure. Some candidates copied out over-long quotations whilst a small minority used no supporting textual references; these answers tended to be more list-like and often went little further than mere identification. The more successful responses balanced their points, confidently interweaving both texts with exemplification and exploration of ideas. The most assured responses included astute analysis of language, tone and purpose as well as content and there were insightful statements such as: 'Both texts express the chaos of an unfamiliar sport from a Western perspective although they differ in tone: Text Two has a critical tone, discussing the danger and idiocy of the race, while Text One offers admiration and appreciation for the courage shown in the sport.' 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**

It was interesting to note that in this series, responses were divided almost equally between the questions.

The task for this question was to write a letter to a newspaper in response to an article with the title 'Competition in sports makes children unwilling to take part'. One examiner reported that 'All candidates appeared to have a clear opinion and generally argued it well' and another noted that 'Whatever their ability, candidates seemed to have something interesting and appropriate to write about.' Some agreed with the statement but many argued forcefully against it and referred to their own personal experiences in responses that one examiner remarked were 'surging with energy and enthusiasm', as evidenced by the candidate who wrote that 'Competition is the sunlight that nurtures success'. Many candidates argued that competitive sport was important for building life skills as an adult, including being generous in victory and learning to cope with defeat.

At the lower end of achievement a few candidates did little more than deliver a brief and unstructured 'rant'. Spelling was often sound but errors in sentence structure and syntax sometimes led to a lack of clarity and coherence.

Most candidates were confident with the formal letter format, adopted a suitable and often authoritative, tone and employed a logical structure that explained their views and experiences. Whilst there were still some candidates who wrote out addresses of the sender and recipient, the majority recognised that it was only necessary to have a salutation and a signing off at the end.

### **Question 7**

This task instructed candidates to write a guide for teenagers about road safety. All seemed able to come up with, at the least, a collection of reasons why the roads were becoming more dangerous.

At the lower end some candidates struggled to present their advice in anything more than a bullet-pointed list. Higher level responses adopted the tone and layout of a guide with sub-headings, occasional use of bullet points and address to the reader and also maintained a strong, precisely-focused sense of audience and purpose. They also included a convincing range of modern risks to road safety such as phones being a distraction and drivers listening to music through earphones not being aware of sirens, horns etc that might alert them to dangers. One candidate, offering guidance clearly targeted at a young reader wrote: 'Seatbelts may not seem 'cool' and they might not 'look cute in your selfie' but they are probably the most important safety feature in a car.'

Whilst most candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of the format, one examiner noted that a number of candidates 'got rather carried away with listing things people should do to be safe and did not consider using persuasive features'.

### **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. Candidates are advised that colloquialisms such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' should only be employed in direct speech.

Examiners commented that where there was evidence of planning, this often led to a clear and effective structure and greater textual cohesion and accuracy.



## **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 answers to Questions 1, 2 or 3
- underline or highlight the key words of Question 4 so that answers are appropriately focused
- 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

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