

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

International GCSE
English Language B (4EB0) Paper 01

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The texts were accessible across the full range of abilities and enabled candidates to respond appropriately. Some candidates found the Bill Bryson passage more challenging.

Section A

This consists of mainly short answer questions that require candidates to locate and retrieve relevant information. Questions 3, 8, and 9 required candidates to use their own words.

Question 10 is longer requiring candidates to give a personal response and justify it with references to the text.

Many responses showed evidence of good teaching and learning with candidates showing the ability to demonstrate understanding by accurately selecting relevant material from the passages.

There were some very good answers to questions 1-9 but many candidates continued to have difficulty with the requirement for own words thus limiting their performance. Where it is difficult to find synonyms, candidates should rework the material using their own words as far as possible. Centres are reminded of the continuing need to teach vocabulary and the use of synonyms to enable candidates to access the full range of marks.

Some examiners commented on the lengthy responses to some of these questions, which are essentially testing a candidate's ability to retrieve information. Some candidates spent time writing analytical responses which gained no more marks. There were some candidates who had difficulty with the requirements of Question 8 and 9 in understanding the difference between 'feelings' and 'experiences' and used the same or similar material for both questions. Candidates should be made aware that the same material will not be the answer to two different questions.

There was evidence that some candidates had been prepared extremely well for this task question 10. This provided more varied responses with most candidates able to make some sort of choice but only the more able were able to provide the developed ideas and close reference to the texts that the task required. Candidates need to be taught that their reasons must be supported by close reference to the texts (quotations) and full explanations. There were some candidates who simply copied parts of the texts but offered no explanation for these.

A few candidates misread the question and wrote an article. Centres must train students in identifying key words in questions to enable them to respond correctly to the task.

Some candidates responded at great length to this question, writing as much as 2 pages in response to what is a 6 mark question, often having achieved full marks on the first page. Candidates need to be reminded that the marks tend to reflect the time which should be spent on the response.

Section B (Question 11)

There were some well focused, lively and articulately presented responses to this task.

There was some evidence of planning which is to be encouraged as it helps candidates to focus on the task and organise their ideas more clearly.

Most candidates understood the requirement of the task however not all were able to use the appropriate register for a speech. Some candidates simply used an appropriate opening and ending and wrote an essay. More successful responses were striking in both their focus on the texts and their ability to write a convincing speech for their peers. Centres need to ensure that candidates not only have a clear idea of relevant format but also how to demonstrate a strong sense of audience and appropriate register. If this is not clear candidates will not be able to access the full range of marks.

There were some responses that did not use the ideas from the texts as a focus for their responses. Again centres need to ensure that candidates are able to identify the key information in the question. Some were able to combine the ideas from the texts effectively with their own (often wide) experiences. Others did not cover the three bullet points (the most commonly missed was the last).

There were some candidates who copied parts of the texts or re-told the texts which did not enable them to demonstrate the skills being assessed. Candidates must understand that copying a text does not demonstrate understanding and candidates must be taught how to adapt texts appropriately.

Centres are reminded that there is no word count for this task and candidates who limited themselves by attempting to stick to the word count from the legacy specification often did themselves a disservice.

Some responses lacked paragraphing despite the three bullet points giving some idea of an appropriate structure. Centres are reminded that accurate paragraphing is important and lack of paragraphs restricts candidates' achievement.

Language controls were not always secure.

Section C (Question 12)

12a and 12b were more popular.

Many examiners commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

There was some evidence of candidates planning their responses and this is to be encouraged. A short plan is always helpful for a writing response as it helps candidates focus on the task. However there were some candidates who wrote a draft essay and then simply copied it with no amendments as a final piece. This does not seem to be a particularly helpful approach.

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section.

Question 12a produced some well written responses with ambitious vocabulary and a clear and developed sense of place. There were also some rather pedestrian and unimaginative responses. Some candidates produced fact files rather than descriptive writing. Others slipped into narrative or personal reminiscences. Centres need to work with candidates to ensure that they clearly understand the type of response that is required by the instruction 'Describe'.

Favourite places varied enormously e.g. fantasy islands, bedrooms, a hospital ship, and gardens. Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, however the weaker responses had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Question 12b produced some original plots and characterisation with a wide range of interpretations of the title e.g. prison, alien invasion, visiting birth mother, visiting places or family members. Better responses were marked by sensitive writing and original ideas with good technical accuracy. Weaker responses had poor language controls and limited and underdeveloped ideas. Some candidates spent too long on the build up to the visit and lost the focus of the task.

Some candidates used prepared passages or thinly disguised TV or film plots which did not enable them to achieve the full range of marks. Although there seems to have been less evidence of prepared passages than in the legacy O-level it is important that centres ensure that candidates know that this is not an acceptable approach.

Some examiners commented that it was not always entirely clear from the content whether the candidate was answering 12a or 12b. Centres must ensure that candidates clearly understand the different requirements of the different types of writing and the skills they need to demonstrate to respond to them successfully.

Question 12c produced some well developed responses but many candidates had problems with arguing a case and produced responses that were little more than a list of points. Some candidates often listed places that they had visited that they thought were great rather than arguing a case. Better responses were sharply focused with fully developed arguments in support of their point of view and had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had a limited range of ideas, poor language controls and weak paragraphing. Candidates who choose the argumentative/discursive option must be trained in the appropriate rhetorical techniques to support their ideas.

Some examiners noted the lack of ambitious vocabulary in the essays which led to rather uninspired responses. Centres need to ensure that candidates develop their vocabulary fully so they can confidently use it appropriately. Many examiners commented on problems with lack of paragraphing, both in otherwise well-written responses and those weaker ones. Candidates must be made aware of the importance of effective paragraphing and must realise that they are limiting their achievement if it is lacking.

Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

This is assessed in Question 11 and 12.

There was evidence of good spelling and basically accurate punctuation which was pleasing to see but the biggest problem was unidiomatic English. This hinders the candidates' ability to express themselves clearly. Many examiners commented that some candidates had problems with grammar, particularly tenses and the correct use of prepositions.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

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