

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language B (4EB0)
Paper 01

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Introduction

The texts were accessible across the full range of abilities and enabled candidates to respond appropriately. Some examiners commented on the engagement with the topics that the candidates showed. Stronger candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and respond with sensitivity and fluency. In their writing they produced lively and confident responses which were well-controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages. Their writing lacked coherence and the use of idiomatic English.

There are still candidates who copy out all or considerable chunks of the passages in response to Question 11. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work. Similarly, responses to Question 12 should be original and not prepared essays or regurgitated plots from novels or films. Some responses to Question 11 and 12 lacked paragraphing, and this was not confined only to the weaker candidates. Candidates must understand that the lack of effective paragraphing will limit the success of the response.

There was evidence of some good teaching and learning in the responses to this exam and examiners commented that many candidates seemed well prepared on the whole.

Section A (Questions 1-10)

This consists of mainly short answer questions that require candidates to locate and retrieve relevant information. Some questions 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.

There were some very good answers to questions 1-9 but many candidates continued to have difficulty with the requirement to use their own words, thus limiting their performance. Questions 1, 2, 5 & 6 generally produced successful responses, although examiners did comment that a few candidates lost marks because they referred to the wrong part of the text in their responses. Examiners also commented that candidates often wrote too much in response to these short questions, which is not a good use of their time. Most examiners commented that responses to questions requiring candidates to use their own words (3, 4, 7 & 9) quite often had direct lifting from the texts. This seemed to be more of a problem than in previous series, with some candidates using quotations from the texts in quotation marks. Candidates need to be reminded that if they do not attempt to use their own words in the responding to these questions they will be penalised. However, some examiners commented positively on candidates' attempts to use their own words. Centres need to work with candidates to develop their vocabulary and reinforce that candidates must attempt to produce responses to these questions using their own words. Examiners also noted that candidates are giving too many points in response to some of these questions. Candidates should note the mark allocation for questions as a guide to how much information they need to find.

Question 8 had an amended layout and rubric in the answer booklet, which was intended to aid candidates in responding appropriately to this question and many examiners commented that this had helped candidates to respond appropriately. However, a significant number of candidates did not use their own words for their points, despite the rubric, which meant they could not achieve any marks. Similarly, a number of candidates produced paraphrases of their chosen support as their point – often too close to the text to be rewarded, e.g. the point that “the writer felt that the eclipse was an anti-climax” illustrated with the phrase “the sense of anti-climax was immense” – which does not show that the candidate knows what an anti-climax actually is. Centres need to work with candidates to ensure they understand that they must attempt to provide points in their own words and not use quotations from the text.

Question 10 provided 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. There were clear responses to this task, showing that candidates had been well prepared for this question and had a secure understanding of what is required. If candidates are able to offer two clear reasons why they have chosen a text and support them with two clear references (quotations or indirect references) and a clear reason for not picking the other text with appropriate support, they will produce a successful response. Better responses had clearly identified reasons and appropriate support for their choices. There were some candidates who only responded on their chosen text, which limited their achievement. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the texts, retelling the passages. Some weaker candidates made their choice based on the difficulty of the vocabulary, or the fact that one text included a picture or that they thought one of the texts was boring. Some candidates made very general points which could be written about any text, e.g. ‘the writer uses interesting language’, ‘it is a good read’. These problems suggest that some candidates have not been prepared for this task and unfortunately these problems limited candidates’ achievement. Centres need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts. Some examiners commented that the responses to this question have improved over recent series.

Section B (Question 11)

There was evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was also some evidence of planning, which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Unfortunately, long plans and re-drafting wasted time and often affected the final response as it was rushed. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet.

It was generally felt that candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk to peers. More successful responses used evidence from the texts, added their own ideas, and crafted it with an assured use of English and an insightful understanding of how to relate to their peers. Examiners commented that some candidates only acknowledged the register at the beginning and ending of their response, rather than maintaining it through the whole response. Weaker candidates wrote

descriptive essays or stories rather than a talk or had problems sustaining the required register throughout their response. There were some responses that did not use the ideas from the texts as a focus for their responses but better candidates were able to integrate ideas from the texts with their own points very effectively. Others did not cover the three bullet points in sufficient detail (the last one on what was disappointing was most commonly missed). There was enough relevant material in the two texts for candidates to use to address all three bullet points. There were some very sustained and mature responses covering not only the Northern Lights and the eclipse but tsunamis, tornados, shooting stars and monsoons. Some candidates did not write about natural events or sights but wrote about seeing man-made structures - the Taj Mahal, Stonehenge, Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and the pyramids were all seen by examiners - which limited their achievement for AO1. Examiners commented that some candidates directly lifted content from the original texts, which affected the overall quality of the response, but some examiners felt that this occurred less than in previous series. Language controls were not always secure, especially grammar, and some responses lacked paragraphing. The three bullet points provide a rudimentary structure which should help candidates to use basic paragraphing. Centres need to remind candidates that lack of accurate paragraphing will limit their achievement.

Section C (Question 12)

There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was also evidence of planning in this section, which is to be encouraged. However, the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets. Examiners commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 12a produced some well written responses with ambitious vocabulary and clear and developed arguments. There was evidence of some strong feelings and genuine engagement with the topic of parental control in some of the responses. The better ones wrote a balanced argument and tried to be a little more imaginative in their approach by presenting situations to illustrate what they were arguing. Many candidates did not think parents had enough control over their children. Many instances were given and ideas of how control could be achieved were put forward. Generally it would appear that most candidates were looking for more control and communication and were aware of the future outcomes if this was not available. Candidates clearly drew on their own experiences and understanding and this allowed for some very competent writing and some very well-developed and well-expressed ideas. Weaker candidates had problems with both maintaining a clear argument and structuring their responses. Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, however the weaker responses had poor language controls and weak paragraphing. Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

Question 12b produced some original ideas with a wide range of interpretations of the title. Many candidates handled this task with enthusiasm and the ability to

develop a well-constructed short story was often very impressive. Examiners commented that there were some original ideas that were told in a compelling and engaging way. Topics covered a wide range and included inventions, holidays and surprise parties. Some examiners commented that some of the ideas were a little far-fetched and endings were sometimes contrived. Some examiners commented that there were some candidates who seemed to use the 'brilliant idea' as an add-on in a prepared essay. There was some evidence of prepared essays with little adaptation and also the use of films, games and books for plot lines. Better responses were able to create tension and use effective description and dialogue with good technical accuracy. Weaker responses lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative together with poor language controls. Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

Question 12c was the most popular option chosen by candidates. This question produced some well written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing a favourite time of the year. Choices included all the seasons as well as annual celebrations but some candidates chose an event such as a wedding or a concert, which was not really appropriate. Examiners commented with enthusiasm about the quality of some of the responses. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. Some gave wonderful descriptions of the natural environment at different times of the year. Others, perhaps predictably, selected winter/Christmas, and summed up everything nostalgic about ideal family Christmas card style festivities. A large number chose summer and trips to the beach, time off school and fun with friends. Some responses ranged through a number of different times of the year, which meant there was a lack of detailed description. There were many responses that were effective and sustained. Where most successful, candidates developed descriptions using wide-ranging and apt vocabulary and gave reasons for their choice of favourite time of the year. Weaker candidates tended to lose the focus on the descriptive nature of the task and lapse into narrative or produce responses that tended to be pedestrian and lacked detail. Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing. Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary.

Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

This is assessed in Questions 11 and 12.

Better responses were accurately using a wide range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary. As in previous series, there was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication. 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.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- selected relevant points in response to the reading questions
- used their own words in response to questions that required them
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well-developed and controlled (Question 12)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to find enough relevant points in response to the reading questions
- did not attempt to use their own words in response to questions that required them
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 11
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 12)
- sometimes used prepared essays or copied plots from films, games and novels in response to Section C (Question 12)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

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