



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Language (Specification A)
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Introduction

This report will provide exemplification of candidates' work, together with tips and comments, for Paper 2 of the International GCSE Specification A in English Language. The paper consists of three components: Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing - 60% (examination); Unit 2: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing - 40% (this examination) OR Unit 3: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing - 40% (non-examination assessment). Candidates may also be entered for the optional Spoken Language Endorsement (non-examination assessment). Unit 2 for Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing is assessed through an examination lasting one hour and thirty minutes. The total number of marks available is 60. The reading and writing sections on this paper are loosely linked by the theme of the text from the Anthology which appears on the examination paper.

This focus of this component is:

Section A - Poetry and Prose Texts: study and analyse selections from a range of fictional poetry and prose texts.

Candidates should study the poetry and prose provided in Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology* in preparation for responding to a given extract in the examination.

The specification identifies that candidates:

‘should be able to read substantial pieces of writing (extended texts) that make significant demands on them in terms of content, structure and the quality of language. Throughout the qualification, candidates should develop the skills of inference and analysis.’

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section A, and there will be one essay question on a poetry or prose text from Part 2 of the *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology*, which will be made available in a booklet in the examination if it is a longer extract or will be in the Question Paper in the case of a poem.

Candidates will answer the question in this section and 30 marks are available. There are three bullet points to prompt the response and the third bullet always asks candidates to consider language and structure.

Section B - Imaginative Writing: explore and develop imaginative writing skills.

Candidates are advised to allocate 45 minutes to Section B. There are three writing tasks, to some extent linked by theme to the reading extract. Candidates pick one question to respond to and the response is worth 30 marks. The format of the tasks remains the same for each series - Question 1 follows the format ‘Write about a time when you, or someone you know...’, Question 2 follows the format ‘Write a story with the title...’ and Question 3 offers two images as a prompt for a

response which is always ‘Write a story that begins...’ or ‘Write a story that ends...’.

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

AO2:

- understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects.

Section B: Writing

AO4:

- communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences

AO5:

- write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation.

It was clear that candidates were all able to respond to the prose extract from the Anthology in the examination, and that most had studied it before. Some candidates had been taught the background to the prose extract.

Throughout the paper, overall candidates had been prepared well and all had, at different levels, developed the skills required to answer the questions.

It was also clear that candidates used what they had studied in their reading to feed into their imaginative writing, which inspired them. As the specification identifies, the main aims for our candidates in this paper are:

- read critically and use knowledge gained from wide reading to inform and improve their own writing
- write effectively and coherently using Standard English appropriately
- use grammar correctly, punctuate and spell accurately
- acquire and apply a wide vocabulary alongside knowledge and understanding of grammatical terminology, and linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language.

Candidates had, pleasingly, been given the opportunity to practise their writing techniques and planning and proofreading skills.

The responses of candidates had some positive features. Examiners were impressed by:

- evidence that many candidates had understood the content of and ideas in the prose extract, at least for the opening and the ending of the extract
- the successful use of the bullet points within the question
- the references to context in response to the prose extract
- the range of vocabulary for AO5
- writing that showed creative ideas and suitable tone, style and register for audience and purpose.

Less successful responses:

- demonstrated a lack of awareness of the range of ideas in the prose extract
- failed to reference the question, with candidates simply writing all they knew about the story
- followed a rigid structure in their responses, with a section-by-section approach
- had an insecure grasp of language and structure with a lack of understanding of how language and structure were used, feature-spotting or confusion of terms
- had limited comment on language and structure and relied heavily on description of ideas or events for Question 1
- failed to support points using appropriate textual evidence
- lacked organisation of writing
- lacked accurate spelling and secure control of punctuation and grammar.

It was clear that candidates had been able to understand the ideas in the prose extract and could comment on language and structural features. Their imaginative writing was often engaging, enthusiastic and had a clear sense of purpose and audience in the voice and ideas used.

As Principal Examiner for this paper it was a privilege to read such accomplished work and to see the engagement, interest and significant hard work in the responses candidates had completed.

Question 1

The majority of candidates appeared to be able to engage with the prose extract and focus their discussion on the presentation of society. There was a variety of responses across most levels, and regardless of level, the majority of responses largely followed the requirement of the mark scheme. Points on language and structure were less securely made across the responses, with more instances of underdeveloped feature-spotting, or where AO2 was not considered at all.

AO1

AO1 requires candidates to read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives. The level of understanding of the text from the Anthology is assessed in the first bullet point, and the selection and

interpretation of information, ideas and perspectives in the text in the second bullet point.

All candidates had at least some knowledge of the prose extract. Some candidates decided to write an introductory paragraph outlining the story and this did help to focus responses on key elements of this longer extract, as it meant they showed awareness of the loss of the necklace and the effect this loss had. Many candidates spent far too long on the opening sections of the story, so failed to mention the necklace and its significance at all. Organisation of material was an issue for some candidates, in that answers covered the first part of the story in great detail but ran out of time to deal with later events. Many candidates also forgot the focus of the question, which was the presentation of society, although there were some implied comments in the material included.

Some candidates opened by identifying aspects of society such as the class system, rich versus poor, the position of women, the importance of appearance, the focus on materialism and offered evidence in support, although this tended to lead to over-reliance on the first part of the story at the expense of later events.

Another approach was to work through the bullet points in the question, using them as headings. Most comment was made on Madame Loisel, with her selfishness emphasised and her 'dreams' explored, with comment on society's emphasis on wealth and status, as well as the situation of women in general. The change in her from a 'pretty, delightful girl' to the 'hard ... housewife' was mentioned by the few who reached the final stages of the story. There was some mention of the dramatic irony of the final revelation that the necklace was imitation, although this could have been more developed - for example, in the case where one candidate commented that even the rich resorted to pretence at times.

The character of Monsieur Loisel was developed in some detail, with focus on his care for his wife, seen through his sacrifice of his own plans in exchange for the dress and his support of his wife once the necklace was lost. A few candidates pointed out that it was his idea to pretend the necklace was damaged, not lost, which led to comments on the importance of telling the truth. His unceasing work to pay off their debts was mentioned, showing, as it did, his love for his wife. Madame Forestier was also covered by most candidates, with emphasis on her generosity, even though Madame Loisel had not visited her for some time. Her reaction to Madame Loisel at the end of the story was seen by candidates who reached that point as proof of the divide between rich and poor in society.

More successful responses were able to give several themes from the text about how Madame Loisel was presented and included details about how society expected women to be, what the values at the time were and how shallow they were. There were several examples given of how Madame Loisel's attempts to gain entry to the higher echelons were her downfall. Comparisons were made between how she perceived society and how it was exposed as a fraud at the end.

Slightly less successful responses concentrated mainly on Monsieur Loisel and his attempts to humour his wife and keep her happy. They gave several reasons for his ignorance of her attitude and how he tried to 'humour her along'. Less successful

responses were not making links between society and the downfall of the Loiseles, choosing instead to concentrate on Madame Loisel's lack of dresses and jewellery. They gave few examples of the significance of the actual necklace and what it represented. Some of these responses gave a description of the story but failed to analyse any of it.

A02

For A02, candidates are required to demonstrate that they can understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. There needs to be understanding of the language and structure used in the text, and the level of skill is also a discriminator. *Explain* is a mid-level skill, *comment* a lower level skill and *explore/analyse* higher-level skills, which gives students opportunities to achieve across the range.

The least successful responses did not cover A02 at all, but it was possible to reward some implied language consideration in the quotations selected and where a comment such as 'description is used' / 'this emphasises' was made. Other, less successful, responses offered a list of features, sometimes with evidence, such as the use of short sentences and dialogue but seldom with comment on the effects. More positive was the signposting of structure, for example a strong sense of setting with the description of the run-down apartment, the contrast / juxtaposing of Madame Loisel and her husband. Some more successful responses did refer to the effect on the reader.

The more successful responses presented thorough investigations into the prose extract and made several valid comments supported by textual references. They understood why certain language techniques were used to portray the events and how they affected the story.

Writing

As always, examiners noted that these imaginative writing pieces were often really enjoyable to read, with an impressive amount and quality produced under timed conditions. There were responses seen in this section across the full range of levels.

The least successful responses were basic responses, with straightforward use of tone, style and register, with audience and purpose not always clear. At this level candidates tended to express but not always connect ideas and information, with limited use of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. There were few responses that only achieved Level 1 - this was mostly because these candidates hardly wrote anything, offering a basic response.

The mid-level responses tended to at least have straightforward and at best appropriate use of tone, style and register, selecting material and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose. At this level candidates tended to connect, but not always develop, ideas and information, with some structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. There was a tendency in the majority of responses marked in this range to set out a stronger description in the start of the

story and then focus more on quickly moving the plot on towards the end where planning had let the candidates down. In some cases, the writing lacked development to move higher into the mark scheme for AO4. At this level the use of vocabulary and syntax tended to be appropriate but repetitive and at times limited to vague simile / metaphor, use of short sentences, questions and exclamations for effect. The level of AO6 at this borderline was appropriate but overall formulaic, where it appeared that candidates had been advised to include plenty of descriptive techniques in their writing - whether they were appropriate or not.

In the best responses, candidates tended to at least have successful and at best touches of subtle use of tone, style and register, managing ideas and stylistic or rhetorical devices to suit audience and purpose. These responses tended to manage, but not always manipulate, ideas and information, with a range of structural and grammatical features and paragraphing. Responses at this level had some creative ideas and used devices such as a build-up of tension, humour and withholding information to the end as a technique. The most successful tended to have some selective vocabulary used for specific effect rather than just to demonstrate knowledge of particular multi-syllabic words. In general, examiners felt many candidates seemed to be thoughtful about the way they opened stories, keeping the reader guessing and engaged in the early stages of a story.

The assessment objectives for these tasks effectively discriminated the quality of responses. As always, advice to centres would be to encourage candidates to avoid thinking they need to write a whole novel or even short story in the time available - they need to have a clear organisation and direction in mind and use vocabulary and syntax strategically.

The main areas that discriminated these responses were:

- whether candidates could meet both parts of the first part of bullet one in the mark scheme for AO5 - for example, they often expressed ideas to achieve in Level 2, but these ideas lacked the order for the second part of that bullet. In Level 3, they may have connected ideas but not developed them.
- the success of tone, style and register in AO4.
- whether candidates had really considered the assessment objective requirement to write for 'specific purposes and audiences'. This means answering **the question given** in an appropriate way, rather than using a past paper response prepared (for example, 'The Painting') and trying to add the title in. This approach of preparing responses may not often achieve successful communication of purpose
- the spelling of basic vocabulary in AO5.
- the accuracy of punctuation and use of varied punctuation in AO5.
- the use of a range of sentence structures for AO5.

As in previous series, sentence structure was clearly an area centres had focussed on: varying the way sentences begin; more use of subordinate clauses to begin complex sentences; effective use of one-word sentences and one-sentence paragraphs to demonstrate conscious crafting. Some candidates attempted to use

ambitious vocabulary while some seemed to steer away from ambitious vocabulary in order to maintain accuracy. A key message to centres is to focus on crafting and organisation whatever the nature of the task. This was a common weakness running through all but the very best responses. The less successful responses showed a lack of organisation and demonstrated a lack of planning and direction.

In terms of register it was clear that the majority of the candidates knew how to write an imaginative piece, however there were some that produced responses that were more like an essay. Some key issues were the achievement of the purpose of the writing, especially when candidates had created what appeared pre-prepared responses which just had a statement bolted on at the end to link it to the title, for example 'I was on the road home'.

Examiners felt that, overall, there were some incredibly imaginative responses with a great range of ideas used creatively. One noted 'There were some very inventive pieces using wide vocabulary and clear layouts with paragraphing.'

Question 2: Write about a time when you, or someone you know, found something valuable.

This question was one of the most popular of the three. There were a wide variety of approaches here, from concrete to abstract, for example finding themselves or friendship. Some were noted as 'heart-warming: I became poor in wealth but rich in happiness'.

Less successful responses were those that were unfinished - even promising ones. The most popular items of value to be found in these responses were boxes left by various relatives, possibly inspired by the images for Question 4 (this is fine to do). They contained keys to other items or letters claiming to know secrets the recipient should know about. There were some inspired by events in the prose extract, i.e. a necklace or other piece of jewellery.

Question 3: Write a story with the title 'The Road Home'.

This question was the popular of the three this series and provided some quite moving responses. There were some with people travelling home after years away, finding their way home out of hospital following treatment for mental health and one very moving response where a grand-daughter helped her grand-mother to find her way home from her dementia. These showed a great deal of thought and consideration on the part of the candidate.

More successful responses had focus on the purpose, although these could be quite straightforward in tone - one literally told of the journey from school home and outlined every shop / house passed. There were many roads back to family, lots of hope lost and restored, promises made, illness recovered from. Various breakdowns and journeys were interrupted before a happy outcome. Most successful responses moved through the narrative to a full-length explanation involving a long journey abroad or deep caves.

Less successful responses failed to give a reasonable conclusion to the story, leaving it on a cliff-hanger (a common way of dealing with this in an examination context).

Mainly the responses were narrative, although some included more of a description. Some adopted a tone which was intended to influence the reader. A number of candidates seemed to have ignored the title and then tacked it on at the end - this is not always very successful.

Question 4: Look at the images provided. Write a story that begins ‘I slowly opened the box.

The images proved to be useful stimulus material. Responses here varied in quality as often there was nothing in the box or it was a mysterious key that led to a house in a wood, a ghoulish attack from which there was no recovery and not much of an ending. Most candidates tried hard to craft the piece with varying sentence structures and vocabulary. Sometimes there was a tendency to keep writing when it would have been better to end, it added nothing and almost detracted from the piece.

Less successful candidates gave a small story using one or two paragraphs where a box is found, opened and contained nothing. There was limited or no attempt to expand on the story.

Some responses used a different approach than with Question 2 as the box had already been found and candidates wrote about valuable items inside the box, namely jewellery, wills and treasure maps. There were fewer responses to this question and most candidates wrote short responses for it rather than the longer ones in Questions 2 or 3.

Summary

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

- Ensure you have studied the poetry and prose texts in the Anthology fully and use the examination time to remind yourself of the text, not re-read it.
- When there is a longer prose extract to be used, consider what the key points are linked to the question you are being asked.
- Make you are strategically covering the whole prose extract from beginning to end, relevant to the question, in order to meet AO1 in the higher levels.
- Read the question carefully and make sure you are answering **this** question, not telling the examiner what you know about the text you have studied or read. The selection needs to be relevant to the question you are being asked, in this case the presentation of society.
- For AO2 (language and structure), make sure you are offering ideas about how language and structure are used. Many of you were able to give examples, but sometimes you did not offer a comment about the example was used.

- For AO2 try to cover points on both language and structure, commenting on the different techniques that have been used by the writer and how they link to the overall topic of the question, in this case the presentation of society
- When you are writing, always think about your reader, what information and ideas you want to develop and how you want the reader to react at different parts of your writing; then choose the best words, phrases or techniques available to you to achieve those effects. Think about ‘how do you want your reader to feel?’ and ‘how will you achieve this?’ to encourage more conscious crafting of writing.
- Listen to your teacher’s advice and make sure to plan - some responses felt as if they had little purpose or understanding of how they were going to conclude.
- Think carefully about how you start and end. Think about how you will begin to write so that it is engaging for your reader from the very start. As you begin to write, know where you will end. This will help you to write in a manner that is cohesive and coherent for your reader.
- Take care throughout with accuracy: spelling, punctuation and grammar
- In writing, focus on crafting and organisation whatever the nature of the task.
- Be ambitious in your structure, vocabulary and range of ideas and try to be creative and original.
- Always respond to the questions set, not a question you have prepared - this rarely leads to effective responses as the response needs to be appropriate and at least clearly linked to the purpose (i.e. the title).

