



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2020

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Level
In English Language & Literature (9ELO_01)
Paper 1: Voices in Speech and Writing

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9EL01 is a written examination of 2 hours' 30 duration. This component has an explicit focus on the concept of 'voice' and how spoken voices are formed, and written voices created, in literary, non-literary and digital texts. 9EL01 has two 'set' texts: the Pearson Anthology of non-literary and digital texts, and a drama text selected by centres for study. The paper comprises two sections. Each section is equally weighted with a total of 25 marks available for each component.

Section A: Voices in 20th- and 21st century Texts

This question assesses AO1 ,2,3 and 4. Candidates are presented with one comparative essay question on one unseen extract selected from 20th- or 21st century sources and one text from the Pearson Anthology

The unseen extract is taken from a broad genre which has been studied in the Anthology and will be linked in some way to the Anthology text, with which it is partnered, to afford the comparison that is central to the assessment of AO4.

Section B: Drama Texts

Candidates are presented with an extract-based essay question on the chosen drama text. This is an 'open book' examination – a clean copy of the prescribed drama text can be taken into the exam.

The questions set for Section B use the extract provided as a starting point for analysis and as a springboard for linked discussion across the broader play.

Overview of assessment

- Written examination, lasting 2 hours 30 minutes.
- Open book – a clean copy of the prescribed drama text can be taken into the exam.
- Two sections – students answer the question in Section A and one question on their chosen drama text in Section B.
- Total of 50 marks available – 25 marks for Section A and 25 marks for Section B.
- **Section A – Voices in 20th- and 21st century Texts:** one comparative essay question on one unseen extract selected from 20th- or 21st-century sources and one text from the anthology (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4 assessed).
- **Section B – Drama Texts:** one extract-based essay question on the chosen drama text (AO1, AO2, AO3 assessed).

Assessment objectives

AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received

AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and method

There were very few entries for the October 2020 series, yet performance patterns were similar to those in other more 'conventional' series. The exception to this was that there were no scripts that fell below the E/U border.

Question 1 (Section A)

This question was presented to the full cohort.

The wording of the question provided a specific focus for investigation and comparison: 'problems faced by people living with disability'. Most candidates responded to this prompt and all but those at the lowest levels of achievement used this to frame their response beyond a more general comparison. Lack of focus on the specific wording of the question held some less successful candidates back.

Most candidates engaged well with both texts. Given the fact that Text B (Birrell) was drawn from the set anthology and Text A (Grant) was unseen there was sometimes a slight imbalance in coverage in borderline responses but this was not significant in the majority of answers.

Most candidates wrote well about the diary format in Text A and how it was used to convey the voice and the experiences of Nina Grant. Generic conventions were acknowledged in most and in the best were linked with some insight to Grant's overriding objective to raise awareness of the problems faced by wheelchair users and to challenge attitudes towards the disabled. Not everyone noticed that the entry was part of a collection, compiled and published in 'The Guardian', information that would have been useful in developing contextual comments. The introduction to the extract is usually a good place to start when exploring the unseen text.

The handling of Text B was generally successful, although the form was less easy to categorise (other than the generic 'article') for some. Many successfully took their cue for exploration from Birrell's title and traced the change in tone and content from his celebratory comments on greater tolerance towards the range of 'minority' groups to the seeming neglect of the disabled. This enabled a sometimes insightful investigation of Birrell's intention in highlighting the disparity between treatment of the disabled and other 'minorities' as part of his campaign for social and legislative change.

There were still some feature spotting approaches, although this is becoming less evident year on year. Language terminology was applied effectively in the best responses but was still thin in many less successful answers. There was generally greater security (and detail) with word level analysis. There was a tendency in mid-level responses to skirt around sentence level analysis with the usual grouped/collective referencing to sentence types and the categorisation of all questions as 'rhetorical'. Some responses peppered grammatical labels (especially 'adjective') across their answers seemingly a random. It is better to apply a few

accurate, analytical terms where they really further the analysis, than to sprinkle them throughout in hope that some will land correctly.

Responses covered all the AOs in both texts; with more effective responses differentiated by their ability to produce an integrated and comparative analysis and their careful selection of examples. There was generally good focus on comparison and finding connections, despite some imbalance between coverage of texts; at times there were some really sensitive and subtle points made for AO4.

I felt that an issue with less successful responses this year was the correct identification of word classes which meant that many students struggled to discuss, with precision, the specific feature used to convey meaning on a lexical level – this is something that could be emphasised in exam preparation.

Successful responses presented a controlled discussion of concepts and methods supported by appropriate evidence drawn across both source texts to address AO1 & 2. Terms were applied in good range at word, sentence and whole-text level to evidence understanding of the writer's craft and offer developed links between form and function (AO2). Exemplification was consistent and appropriate. The better answers noticed the register shifts and used this to comment on the subtler aspects of voice as a result.

For AO3 successful responses demonstrated a clear awareness of links between the texts and contextual factors that influenced their production and/or reception. A range of connections were explored and candidates were able to elaborate on the reasons the texts could be purposefully connected. More confident candidates were able to weave the aspects of form into comments about their analysis of devices within the texts rather than making stand-alone points just concerning form or genre. The very best offered integrated comparison rather a side-by-side comparative approach.

Less successful responses picked upon some general language features. In mid-lower level answers exemplification was inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate. In these responses candidates often confused basic labels such as verb/noun or adjective/adverb and there was tendency to label any question as 'rhetorical'. Levels of specific analysis and links between form and function were limited and/or undeveloped. Most candidates commented on the literary devices employed though they couldn't always say what functions they served. Many answers offered very general and obvious interpretation rather than specific analysis. Many made minimal links to function such as 'this feature makes it entertaining' or 'makes the reader read on'. Analysis tended to be non-specific with vague phrases such as 'incorrect grammar'. Many such responses also included bold claims about contextual factors, particularly the audience.

Section B: Q2-8

Despite the limited numbers the pattern of text choice was very similar across series with Q2 (Miller) and Q3 (Williams) the most popular choice of set texts. I have commented specifically on these questions below. There were also responses (in single figures) to Q5 (Shaffer), Q6 (Bennett), Q7 (Churchill) and Q8 (Friel) and performance relating to these texts in this atypical series is summarised below, There was no evidence that any of the questions presented less/more challenge to candidates.

Successful responses For AO1, responses were well structured and expressed. These offered a detailed, analytical and generally well-focussed investigation of the extract and a balance achieved between this and the exploration of the broader text. There was security with both literary and linguistic frameworks of analysis and attendant terminology.

Assertion was supported by appropriate evidence drawn from the extract and the broader text with developed links between form and function (AO2). Responses focused with some consistency on the central issues of the task with a clear sense of the writer's craft and intent (AO2).

For AO3 comments on context were relevant to the specifics of the task and were well developed/integrated. They extended to consider dramatic form, technique and convention – all key contextual points.

Less successful responses were often uneven with an imbalance between exploration of the given extract and extension to the broader text (or vice versa). There was often a lack of focus on the specific aspects of the task and a tendency to generalised discussion or an anticipated agenda.

For AO1 there was straightforward and undeveloped analysis. Many of the responses lapsed into description. In the lower levels of achievement there was inaccuracy in the use of terminology and overall expression.

For AO2 there was uncertain understanding of the concept of 'voice' or its construction/presentation. There was a very straightforward reading of the material which demonstrated general understanding but struggled with nuance, tone and register or with the sense of authorial design/craft.

For AO3 comment on context tended to be undeveloped or generalised with limited links to the specifics of the task or the extract. There was limited appreciation of the text in performance.

Question 2

Most candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the play and the pivotal moment this scene represents. The extract afforded clear opportunity to explore the focal issue of guilt – here and across the play as a whole and to link to Miller's use of the relationship between Chris and Ann to expose and develop this. Most explored the extract well and recognised that the presentation Chris's determination to marry Ann is what drives Kate to reveal the truth behind her opposition to the union.

The most successful were those answers that started from an understanding of Miller's use of the relationship as a catalyst for the tragic resolution of the play. Successful responses achieved a balance between close and analytical investigation of the extract and consideration of the broader text and took full advantage of the opportunities afforded before and after the extract such as Kate's persistent and increasingly desperate objections to the relationship throughout the play or George's challenge to the Keller's integrity and his attempt to force Ann to leave with him following his visit to his father in prison.

There was much to explore in the extract in terms of dramatic device and convention as well as the dialogue itself. The best could offer considered comment on the unspoken dramatic conventions/conflicts contained within the extract such as the rising tension between Chris and his mother emphasised by stage direction and positioning. Successful answers offered close comment on the construction of the voices contained in the extract, linking form to function and applying terms with accuracy and in good range.

Less successful responses tended to the descriptive, presenting narrative summaries as opposed to considering Miller's dramatic intentions.

Many responses dealt with the contextual implications of the play which were well linked to this particular extract. The difference between stronger and less successful candidates was the ability to embed these contextual ideas to authorial decisions rather than simply describing issues of war at the time. Those that considered the text as a performance piece, considering dramatic conventions and techniques were rewarded against the contextual AO.

Question 3

The question was specific in its focus on how Williams uses of the relationship between Blanche and Mitch to explore how Blanche responds to her changed circumstances.

Successful answers identified the scene from which the extract was drawn as the first meeting between Mitch and Blanche in the Kowalski's apartment. They explored the interaction between the characters and could comment on their development here - Mitch as a (relatively) sensitive man who offers stark contrast with Stanley; Blanche's approval of this sensitivity and her recognition that Mitch is a romantic possibility given her reduced circumstances.

The extract afforded much scope for investigation and the best answers really explored the skill with which Williams crafts the dialogue. They showed awareness the recurring motif of light and the metaphorical and literal reasons for Blanche's need to avoid exposure to the 'naked-light bulb'.

The question prompts consideration of the relationship between Blanche and Mitch across the play and the way in which he comes to represent her last hope of personal and financial stability in her desperate circumstances. There are many opportunities for this, such as its flirtatious beginnings, the shared experience of loss and loneliness that temporarily unites them and Blanche's relentless deceit and delusion that signals its doom. Candidates sometimes considered the differences in formal manners and education that always set them out as an unequal match.

The best analysed language with some insight and precision applying frameworks and terms in good range. These also considered the staging of the scene and drew interesting conclusions about actions and delivery that conceded fully to the dramatic form.

Less successful were those that deviated quickly from the extract thereby denying themselves the many opportunities it provided. As with other questions in Section B there were some answers that moved quickly into what appeared a different and 'rehearsed' agenda which seemed to be based on a different question - in some instances from an earlier series - thereby not addressing the specifics of the task. Less successful responses tended to describe rather than analyse and offered little sense that the characters were dramatic constructs.

Again, contextual ideas had been extensively taught to candidates but centres should be cautious with the notion of placing too much emphasis on biographical context at the expense of contextual implications of form and genre.

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