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GCE

In English Language and Literature (8EL0)

Paper 1: Voices in Speech and Writing

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Introduction

This unit comprises the first of two examined components of AS Language and Literature and has an explicit focus on the concept of 'voice'. It assesses understanding of how spoken voices are formed and how written voices are created in non-literary and digital texts as well as how texts are formed for specific audiences, purposes and genres.

Section A required candidates to transform the interview with Barack Obama from the anthology into an extract from the interviewer, Jay Leno's, autobiography and Section B required a comparative analysis of an unseen newspaper article and Charlie Brooker's article from the anthology.

For Section A, there were many centres that had prepared their candidates thoroughly for producing autobiographies and they were clearly practised in biographical writing; such candidates, who had also reviewed the source text thoroughly, excelled in this task and produced highly convincing and engaging extracts in the voice of Jay Leno. Successful responses demonstrated understanding of the genre, with a confident grasp of crafting language for a reading audience in an appropriate register and style. At the lower levels, there was significant over-reliance on the source text, making those responses less convincing and original.

Less successful candidates sometimes interpreted the task more as a diary or journal, thus limiting their ability to produce a fully convincing response; by creating a text written immediately after the interview, the writing lacked the reflective nature of memoirs or autobiographies. While many of these diary/journal responses were entertaining, achievement was often restricted due to limited understanding of context and reception. A small minority of candidates misread the question entirely, producing responses in the wrong genre (biography or speech) or from the wrong producer (Obama instead of Leno). Wherever possible, candidates were rewarded positively for their originality and skill, but this type of misinterpretation can be self-limiting.

In Section B, the majority of candidates were familiar with the requirements of the task, demonstrating the care with which centres had prepared them. Some candidates approached the two texts as separate entities but most had clearly practised a comparative approach; the level of nuance and subtlety of the connections explored did vary greatly. There were some more effective responses for this question where candidates were confident in their discussions of the Brooker article and understood the thematic links to the unseen text.

Successful responses resulted from careful selection of the most pertinent areas for comparison dependent on the nature of the unseen text and its links to the anthology text, such as the attitudes and values of the writers/speakers or the connected theme and genre. Many candidates had been well-prepared on the anthology text but found it more challenging to find meaningful links to the unseen. Across all levels, candidates were most confident and detailed in their discussion of issues of context, audience, purpose and tone. However, this was often not backed up by terminology or analysis of specific literary and linguistic techniques.

Overall, candidates produced work which was often engaging and insightful, showing how well centres had prepared them for the exam and the ability of the candidates to write creatively and analytically. Where centres should continue to focus this preparation is in exploring a wider range of genres and text types, identifying the different methods and techniques used by writers and speakers to shape meaning. Familiarity with a fuller range of forms and devices would better prepare candidates for the writing task as well as developing confidence with unseen texts, enabling them to make more subtle and perceptive points about meaning, rather than relying on a prescribed approach.

Similarly, developing detailed knowledge of a wide range of both literary and linguistic techniques would significantly improve candidates' ability to compare the two texts in Section B with real insight. Many candidates rely on 'labelling' word classes (often inaccurately) for very little purpose. This can also hold them back from analysing the pragmatic meaning of the language or its specific effect and purpose.

Section A - Question 1

The "Creation of Voice" task presented candidates with the extract from Jay Leno's television interview with Barack Obama, and asked that it be transformed into an extract from Leno's autobiography.

It was expected that candidates would exhibit the following skills:

- Understand contextual factors and genre conventions.
- Consider how the text is received, with confident crafting of the text.
- Control their own writing style by employing a clear structure and avoiding lapses in clarity.
- Produce a text that engages by using carefully chosen language features.

Many candidates were innovative and imaginative in how they approached this task. A variety of relevant autobiographical writing techniques were employed, including a reflective tone to share anecdotes and thoughts about the interview (including preparing for the show and the subsequent reactions to his conversation with Obama). Some of the best responses also showed a perceptive understanding of how these techniques could be combined to keep the new audience engaged in Leno's autobiography, conveying the information in the interview to the reader.

At the lower levels, candidates struggled more with adopting a form, style and register appropriate for an autobiography. Some candidates produced texts that had more in common with a blog or diary, often in an inappropriately informal register for literary non-fiction.

It was encouraging that only a minority of responses included extensive "lifting" of the source material. However, some candidates produced responses that simply paraphrased the source material with no clear sense of genre, providing little to interest or entertain a

reader looking for insight into Leno's life and career. There were also some candidates who seemed unfamiliar with the source material from the anthology, making comprehension errors.

Responses at the higher levels demonstrated clear understanding of how to write to engage a reading audience, transforming the interview transcript into engaging, often amusing and thought-provoking, prose. These responses were well planned and included carefully chosen information from the source text; this kind of selective, organised approach produced the most convincing and relevant writing.

Question 1 tasks provide the opportunity for the creative use of a range of literary and linguistic devices, such as those candidates have explored when reading or listening to other writers' work. Candidates who attempt to imitate these interesting and imaginative writing techniques in their own work can be rewarded highly for AO5.

Section B – Question 2

The "Comparing Voices" section required a comparative response focussing on how writers shape language to create a sense of voice. The candidates were required to explore connections between two texts linked by the themes of digital communication and the negative effects of social media; the first Charlie Brooker's article taken from the anthology, the second a previously unseen article by The Metro's Lifestyle Editor, Ellen Scott. It was expected that the candidates would exhibit the following skills:

- Organise the structure of their response and write in an appropriate register and style.
- Apply appropriate concepts, methods and terminology.
- Support the exploration with a range of relevant examples.
- Display knowledge and understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts and of the writer's craft.
- Show knowledge of contextual factors and the ability to link this knowledge to how texts are produced and received.
- Explore connections across texts.

On the whole, this task was completed with some confidence by candidates and many had been prepared to adopt a comparative approach; centres appear to be developing the ways in which they teach students to explore two texts at once. Most responses considered a range of similarities within the two texts but candidates, on the whole, were reluctant to consider differences or contrasts, so this is an area on which most centres can continue to work.

At the higher levels, candidates approached the unseen text with confidence and were able to discuss both sources as whole texts, understanding what the writers and speakers were

trying to achieve for their respective audiences, purposes and contexts and linking this explicitly to the linguistic and literary techniques employed in each text. Some students had an effective academic register and knowledge of terminology and were able to use this to evaluate meaning across both texts with contexts of production and reception in mind.

Most centres had prepared candidates well for the Brooker article, including a thorough understanding of the methods used by the writer to create humour and the complex issues relating to modern digital communication. This enabled many candidates to comprehend the thematic link to the unseen text and make sound comparisons in terms of when they were produced and the potential impact on their respective audiences. It was encouraging to see that many candidates, for example, noted the irony of both writers exploring the negative impact of social media and online communication within media articles that were published online. However, some candidates were not so well prepared and struggled to find meaningful links between the two texts.

For some candidates, there was a tendency to make insecure connections between the texts based purely on a limited list of techniques, without considering the links of theme, context or ideas. At the lower levels, candidates were reliant on working through a prescribed list of features and had often adopted formulas for comparison, especially within lengthy introductions, producing generic responses that lacked genuine insight. The use of a formulaic list or a mnemonic for aspects of context or literary and linguistic methods were often indicators of candidates who were not prepared to fully engage with the question or the context of the texts in great depth. Candidates could be better prepared by developing confidence with unseen texts generally rather than learning a prescribed approach that considers a few set features.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, even at the higher levels, candidates were often far more confident on the anthology text than on the unseen, leading to imbalanced responses. Centres should continue to explore a wide range of unseen texts with candidates to increase their confidence in approaching new material in the exam. Many candidates would benefit from more careful planning of their comparative response, and this approach could be reinforced by centres through regular practice of annotating unseen texts and creating plans for a comparative analysis.

The range and relevance of concepts, methods and terminology explored were often a discriminator between the lower and higher levels. Higher level responses linked features to meaning and context, exploring the writer's choices and their effect in detail with relevant exemplification. "Feature spotting" occurred more frequently in lower-level responses, particularly where linguistic understanding was limited to the labelling of word classes with little further explanation of how these words created meaning. Responses in the higher levels showed more careful selection of evidence and tended to explore these quotations in more depth, even where the comparisons made were perhaps a little obvious.

Paper Summary

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

- Read the question carefully and follow its specific demands. This is particularly important for Question 1 but also for Question 2 where the description of the task can vary.
- Plan responses for Question 1 with a clear understanding of genre, audience, purpose and context. Focus on creating an appropriate voice, register and tone based on the task.
- Use a range of information from the source material for Question 1. Remember that this can be combined with additional points or anecdotes as appropriate, and it is not necessary to follow the same structure as the original text.
- Try to make your writing as interesting and creative as you can for Question 1; you could try using some of the methods and techniques you have analysed in other people's work in your own creative writing.
- Develop a flexible "toolkit" of frameworks that can be applied to a variety of texts for Question 2, along with a range of terminology, rather than relying on prescriptive mnemonics or lists of features, as this can lead to "feature spotting". Remember that techniques and terminology can be both linguistic and literary, even for non-fiction texts.
- Consider contrasts or differences as well as similarities in the approaches of the writers of the texts for Question 2.
- Always plan your comparative response and choose your evidence from the texts with care, making sure you have picked the most relevant example for every point.
- For Question 2, explore a range of other "unseen" texts to increase confidence when analysing and making perceptive connections with the anthology texts, particularly for audience and purpose.

