



**General Certificate of Education**

**English Language A 1701**

*Specification A*

**ENGA2      Representation and Language**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination – June series*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

## General

This was the second summer entry for the specification and there was evidence that many centres are now confident of the requirements for both Representation Investigation and Production. In the most successful cases, candidates are clearly being given guidance as to the wide range of topics available, but are free within this framework to pursue their own interests and enthusiasms with regard to representation.

As a result of careful planning, successful candidates were able to focus their investigations on the ways in which writers construct a representation, illustrating the most significant of these with well-chosen quotations, backed up by close linguistic points and perceptive comments. Similarly, production pieces precisely identified their audiences and intended contexts of use and showed a clear awareness of the appropriate form, style and content.

Overall, however, there was a wide gap between successful and unsuccessful candidates, reasons for which are explored below.

## Representation Investigation

### **AO3: Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language**

Online versions of newspapers and magazines were once again the most popular sources of data for investigation. In a minority of cases, the data were not included, which made verification of the centres' assessments very problematic. A few candidates provided data which did not match at all with their analyses; however, such cases were usually noted by centres. Occasionally, moderators noted that all candidates from a centre based their investigations on the same three texts. This is to be strongly discouraged; candidates are expected to be actively engaged in the selection of data for their investigations and to work individually on them, rather than collaboratively.

A few centres seem to have encouraged candidates to write three separate, self-contained analyses, rather than a single investigation. This reduced the effectiveness of the work as a study of representation, since there was no overall line of argument and a tendency to repeat interpretative points with different examples. A small number of candidates used only two texts, rather than the prescribed minimum of three, which led to partial and skimpy study of the representational subject. A similarly small number chose unsuitably short texts, with equally unsuccessful results.

There were some instances of candidates having chosen source texts which they were unable to process adequately, either because of the representational content or the style. In extreme cases, this led to a complete distortion of the writers' ideas; more often the result was simplistic analysis of complex texts. At the other extreme, a few clearly able candidates chose source texts which were too formulaic in style and basic in content to allow them to explore language or ideas in the depth required to achieve a high mark.

Such choices were frequently the result of the continuing fascination with celebrity figures, not all of whom were particularly interesting or relevant from a representational point of view. A similar preoccupation with individuals convicted of violent crime was again evident, even though source texts often took a very similar approach to such individuals, in terms of representation. This meant that candidates tended to write very repetitive analyses and struggled to create any meaningful line of argument. Where there has been a change in media coverage more thoughtful diachronic studies are possible. Examples of such change included Gordon Brown, shown to be successfully dealing with the immediate aftermath of the recent recession, as opposed to criticisms of him as a bully in the run-up to the General Election; Tiger Woods before and after his indiscretions came to light; the particularly controversial attack on Stephen Gateley by Jan Moir compared to responses to her article or earlier appreciations of his success.

Better still, a different perspective can highlight assumptions many people take for granted; *The Indian Times*' reporting on Jade Goody versus Shilpa Shetty or a Yorkshire newspaper discussing the attack on children by children in Edlington made strong contrasts to reports in either *The Sun* or *The Guardian*. At the same time, many of the celebrity investigations discover remarkably little, even when candidates' knowledge of linguistic detail is accurate and wide-ranging. When selecting their subjects and source texts, candidates need to be able to distinguish between what is genuinely significant and what is merely disguised gossip or publicity material. Ideally, they should be encouraged to cast their linguistic nets a little wider to include issues that may, to some of them, seem initially less entertaining to read, but which may raise issues that have relevance to their own lives or those of their peers and families.

There were far more stimulating and challenging pieces on news of wider significance. Many candidates looked at the representation of knife crime, terrorists or minority groups. There was widespread interest in the press coverage of Nick Griffin on BBC's *Question Time*. Issues widely debated in the news this year and which made for valuable and interesting investigations included assisted suicide, accusations of ageism and sexism in the BBC, the takeover of Cadbury's by a non-British multinational, immigration, Facebook, child labour and international adoptions.

To achieve a high mark for this Assessment Objective, candidates need to ensure that their interpretations of lexical, semantic, phonological and grammatical features have a demonstrable link with the representational subject. Some candidates selected textual features without any clear sense of how these might influence readers or shape their responses.

**AO1: Select and apply a range of linguistic methods, to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression**

Here, too, candidates need to be aware of the marking criteria given in the specification. In order to achieve a top band mark for this Assessment Objective, there must be some evidence of sophisticated grammatical understanding linked to a high degree of accuracy. Few candidates were able to identify correctly and consistently such features as clause elements, clause and sentence types. Many referred simply to 'long' or 'short' sentences, which shows no specific linguistic knowledge. Others revealed their uncertainty by referring to sentences which were 'more complex' than others. Few candidates distinguished accurately between 'clause' and 'phrase'.

Word class labelling was also erratic in the work of some candidates. There is still a widespread tendency to refer to any plural noun (and occasionally proper nouns or pronouns) as ‘collective’, to confuse adverbs and adjectives, tense and aspect, active and passive voice, prepositions and auxiliary verbs. Candidates need to exercise caution when dealing with words which can belong to more than one linguistic category, such as *love* or *attack*, which can be either verbs or nouns. In quite a few cases, such errors were not highlighted on the work, so that moderators could not be sure that they had been taken into account when awarding an AO1 mark. Occasionally, errors were ticked and summative comments for this assessment objective confirmed that errors had been overlooked.

As well as rewarding candidates’ use of a linguistic register, AO1 reflects, to some extent, the quality of written language. Although candidates’ work should initially be placed in a band appropriate to their level of linguistic knowledge, nevertheless it cannot be placed at the top of a band if technical errors are frequent. Errors of spelling and punctuation (particularly of sentences) were disappointingly common, as well as flaws in expression. Many candidates misspelled linguistic terms such as *complement*, *auxiliary*, *sentence* and *simile*, but in some cases the misspelling of frequently used words, such as *definitely*, *descriptive*, *argument*, *repetition*, was equally intrusive. In a few cases gross errors impeded comprehension, such as *incense* for *innocence*. Occasionally, syntactical flaws were sufficiently serious to prevent coherent analysis, thus affecting the AO3 mark as well.

Given the opportunity to re-draft and proofread, there is little excuse for basic errors remaining in the final submission. While centres rightly do not carry out close marking at the draft stage, candidates need to be warned when the quality of their writing is unacceptably poor and encouraged to eliminate as many errors as possible before making their final submissions.

Errors which nevertheless remain in the final draft need to be taken into account when awarding the mark. A significant number and range of errors implies that the candidate is not secure in linguistic labelling and therefore unable to achieve a top band mark. Those who did achieve such a mark accurately labelled a range of linguistic examples, including several word classes in detail, as well as some of those features identified in the specification as likely to indicate top band qualities.

Successful candidates:

- had a clear representational topic, which was worthy of detailed investigation
- selected sources of manageable length, with contrasting representations of the subject and which were of stylistic as well as semantic interest
- began with an overview which showed awareness of contexts and wider representational issues
- skilfully linked together the analyses of source texts to create a coherent and well-structured argument
- illustrated their points with brief, precise quotations and used a varied linguistic register
- reached a clear conclusion.

Less successful candidates:

- did not focus on representation or lacked a clear representational focus
- selected sources that were too short or long to sustain close analysis, too similar in content, tone and style, or too bland to yield any analytical insights
- launched into analysis without commenting on contexts, writers, audiences or purposes
- wrote three or four unconnected analyses, with repetitive identification of similar features in each one
- omitted quotations and did not use or lacked control of a linguistic register, so that the investigation consisted chiefly of unsupported assertions
- failed to reach any overall conclusions.

## **Representation Production**

### **AO4: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study**

A: Form and Content

B: Style and Structure

Choices of topic were varied, ranging from predictable and derivative profiles of celebrities (neither creating nor challenging a representation) to a range of more original and therefore interesting subjects. These included social stereotypes such as Northerners by Southerners or Southerners by Northerners, blondes, women drivers, young British males, ballet dancers and football fans, as well as more general topics such as knitting, the Burka ban, cannabis and the monarchy.

In such cases, candidates often challenged widespread assumptions and presented a new perspective on familiar topics, in order to force readers to re-examine their responses or at least appreciate that alternative points of view were equally valid. The best work was of a very high standard indeed, and, in some cases, of publishable quality.

There were some tasks more suited to the legacy specification, such as charity appeals and travel leaflets, which did not directly address representation issues. Although they may create a particular view of a disaster zone like Haiti or an attractive destination like Barcelona, too often the formulaic writing prevented any specific representation; often the commentary did not highlight what this representation might be, or why and how it was targeting its audience. Other types of leaflet were more securely focused on representation of a particular social group, as, for example, the sufferers of a particular disease or disability, but here the problem tended to be that the text featured specialised medical information that, again, was clearly derivative. A few even included images and diagrams from unattributed sources. To be successful, such production pieces would need to identify a credible purpose in a publishable format, and one not already available, to meet a genuine need.

Other problems occurred in articles featuring a known celebrity, either when the piece of work consisted largely of unattributed quotations, which were either derivative, having been taken from an existing source, or inauthentic, having been created by the candidate. In a few cases, a 'celebrity' wrote in the first person, which presented a more extreme form of the same problem.

Many candidates demonstrated a clear knowledge of form for their production pieces. For newspaper or magazine articles, this meant having an appropriate heading (i.e. not simply 'Language Production') and sub-editorial introduction that included the writer's name. When these features were not present, it was sometimes not at all clear what the intended representation, audience and purpose were. Illustrations and photographs, although not strictly necessary, were sometimes used to good effect in terms of authentic appearance; occasionally they lacked appropriate captions to indicate their relevance. In a few cases, where illustrations were taken from an existing source, they tended to cast doubt on the originality of the work. Paragraphing, where appropriate to form, was occasionally haphazard or, in a very few cases, not present at all.

Monologues were again a fairly popular choice of form for challenging social stereotypes. The most successful of these used stage directions skilfully to guide actor or director and created a convincing character and voice. Those which were less successful either omitted stage directions or, improbably, included other on-stage characters, sometimes involved in complicated narratives that were not appropriate to the form.

A few candidates submitted production pieces which were representational exercises rather than texts suitable for a 'real' context: fairy stories with reversed stereotypes, fictional pieces with a narrator whose gender was disguised until a 'shock' ending. The accompanying commentaries either ignored placement in terms of a specific publication or audience or made unconvincing and vague references to 'young adults', 'children' or 'popular magazines'. Candidates need to be firmly directed to consider actual publications or contexts which would provide a suitable and convincing audience for the representations they wish to produce.

#### C: Commentary

Many candidates used the commentary skilfully to illuminate or justify their choice of or approach to a particular representation. They were also able to identify clearly how the production piece was written to affect a specific audience in a specific publication or context. Without such an overview of the writing process, linguistic points tended to be presented in a vacuum, with vague references to effects. In a few cases, there was no use of a linguistic register, which severely limited the mark for this element. Only the most skilful writers managed to produce a successful commentary within the 400 word limit.

#### Successful candidates:

- presented a representation of an individual, group, event or institution in such a way as to challenge or subvert the reader's initial assumptions
- knew precisely the intended context of use, as well as specific audience and purpose
- made such intentions explicit at the start of the commentary or on a separate front sheet
- showed a confident grasp of form and textual conventions
- produced content that was interesting, unusual, stimulating or entertaining
- had a strong sense of voice and address
- wrote stylishly as well as clearly and accurately
- identified in their Commentary a range of key linguistic features, including sentence and clause types, word classes and lexical/semantic items
- added succinct comments to show how the selected features were designed to shape the reader's response
- wrote a 400-word Commentary in well-structured paragraphs beginning with topic sentences.

Less successful candidates:

- produced derivative texts, very similar to existing published ones or created a mis-match of form and content
- failed to consider context of use and audience both in the production piece itself and in the commentary
- ignored or omitted to use appropriate conventions of form and layout
- lacked a coherent voice and addressed audience needs inappropriately, if at all
- made frequent basic errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar
- produced a commentary that consisted of generalised assertions, with little reference to the production text in the form of quotations or specific comments on language and style
- exceeded the word limit without illuminating the writing process.

## **Administration**

The majority of centres sent Centre Mark Forms in by the deadline, with some arriving well in advance, which was helpful to moderators. A few omitted to send the Centre Declaration Form (CDF) with the sample folders. A small minority sent candidates' work without the Candidate Record Form (CRF). These omissions delayed the moderation process.

Many centres presented excellent folders, with all data provided and line referenced and teacher annotations highlighting strengths and weaknesses. Internal cover sheets often served a dual purpose of freeing candidates from a laboured opening paragraph in the investigation and enabling an accurate assessment of the production piece's intentions. Teachers also used them to show the process of initial marking, followed by internal moderation or verification of marks. In such cases, the moderator was able to follow the progress of the work easily.

Occasionally, where marks were changed as a result of internal moderation, the mark on the Centre Mark Form (CMF) was altered, but the CRF was unchanged, so that the moderator had to query the accuracy of the final mark awarded. It would be helpful if centres could check before sending their samples that marks on the CMF, CRF and internal front sheet agree. In a number of cases, there were addition errors, which significantly affected candidates' marks. Since moderators check only a sample of the entry, it is vital that centres make a careful check of CRF additions before submitting folders.

Nearly all candidates used an appropriate font for their work; a few, however, used a very small type size, which, if combined with narrow margins and single line spacing, made it difficult for teachers to annotate work fully and less easy for moderators to read their comments, as well as the work itself. A 12 point size is desirable. Italic or other unusual fonts are to be strongly discouraged unless they are a significant feature of the chosen form.

A few centres are still using plastic wallets, which are more cumbersome for moderators than a simple treasury tag. In a small number of cases, work was sent as loose sheets, increasing the possibility of some sheets being omitted or mislaid.



## Summary of Key Advice

It is very helpful to moderators and/or candidates if teachers do the following:

### a) General

- advise candidates at first draft stage to meet length requirements as nearly as possible
- remind candidates at final draft stage to proofread carefully for technical and labelling errors and, if necessary, to edit or extend their work
- familiarise candidates with marking grid descriptors
- annotate candidates' work thoroughly to identify strengths and weaknesses, so that moderators understand the rationale for marks given
- show the breakdown of marks awarded for AO4 A, B and C
- ensure that marks on candidates' work are consistent with marks on Candidate Record Forms and Centre Mark Sheets, particularly in cases where internal moderation has resulted in changes to the original marks
- discourage the use of complicated folders but check that pieces of work are securely fastened, ideally with candidate name and centre number on each sheet
- remind candidates of appropriate fonts, layout and type size
- consider the use of internal summary sheets to show teachers' and internal moderators' comments as well as candidates' titles or topics, sources used for investigation, context of use and audience for production
- remember to include Centre Declaration forms.

### b) Representation Investigation

- encourage candidates to engage actively in researching topics and texts and to consider issues of genuine controversy, social significance and seriousness, rather than trivial examples of celebrity journalism
- emphasise the need to explore how social values are produced or challenged, involving close study of writers' strategies and techniques
- encourage selection of source texts that cover a range of viewpoints and attitudes, to facilitate a coherent line of argument
- exercise quality control of final choices, in order to ensure texts are not overlong but sufficiently challenging in content and style
- check that candidates have a clear sense of focus on representational topics and issues
- ensure candidates are aware of the need to consider relevant contextual factors and the wider significance of the specific representational focus selected
- encourage exploration of strategies used for audience positioning
- emphasise the need for careful selection of features for analysis in order to produce relevant interpretations within the prescribed word limit
- discourage line-by-line analysis or feature-spotting
- emphasise the need to exemplify linguistic points with well-chosen quotations
- encourage candidates to use a range of lexical, semantic and grammatical features, noting the hierarchy of features in the marking grid for AO1.

c) Representation Production

- encourage candidates to consider a range of genres and writing styles in order to make a judicious choice of form for their production piece
- check that candidates have chosen a suitable form for the content they wish to produce
- check that candidates have a clear idea of the specific context of use for their work, in terms of publication and audience
- identify cases where a bibliography might be advisable to show sources of factual content, illustrations or diagrams
- encourage candidates to place their representations within a wider context of social issues and to mention this briefly in the introduction to their commentaries
- urge candidates to work on their style and expression as well as on content, structure and argument
- emphasise the need in the commentary for careful selection of key linguistic features, supported by brief quotations and succinct comments.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.