**General Certificate of Education**

# English Language A 1701
*Specification A*

**ENGA2    Representation and Language**

# Report on the Examination
*2011 examination – January series*

**General**

The number of entries was relatively small, as is usual in January, when candidates tend to be entering their second attempts at the coursework unit. Some candidates chose to re-submit one piece of work from last summer's entry and produce one new piece. This can work well in cases where one piece is significantly stronger than the other, allowing the candidate to concentrate time and effort on the weaker piece of work.

However, centres need to bear in mind that marks are not carried forward for the previously assessed piece, which the moderator may or may not have seen as part of the centre's sample during the previous moderation period. The submitted coursework folders are moderated afresh by the moderator. Teachers are advised that they must review marks for re-submitted pieces to ensure that they are consistent with the standard which the centre is applying to other folders in the same entry in order to safeguard the integrity of the centre's entry as a whole.

A few candidates re-submitted Investigations which were clearly the weaker of the two pieces last summer and produced new Production pieces in order to improve their overall marks. This decision was possibly made because of time restrictions, but it seemed a pity to limit their potential achievement so severely from the outset.

**Representation Investigation**

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

A few centres are using a cover sheet for Investigation as well as Production tasks. These not only clarify the sources used but, in some cases, require the candidate to give a brief summary of the representation in each source. This seems a good way of emphasising the need to focus on representation and create a line of argument, as well as saving some of the allocated length to use in analysis.

Many Investigations focused on serious topics worthy of detailed study. Such topics included: Tony Blair in the Iraq enquiry; the Pope's visit to the U.K.; ageism in the BBC; the leaders of the Coalition government; spending cuts; student fees protests: Facebook; the war in Iraq from soldiers' viewpoints; the November 11th poppy-burning.

Increasingly, candidates are recognising the advantage of choosing a topic which has caused genuine controversy: contrasting source texts are likely to be readily available and the differing representations facilitate a line of argument in the analysis. In the vast majority of centres, topics chosen were very varied, indicating that candidates were able to exercise a reasonably free choice. On the other hand, however, there was strong evidence of teachers carefully influencing choices, to ensure that the topic suited the type of analysis required.

In a few cases, candidates omitted to focus on representation of any particular person, group, event or institution, but simply analysed a number of linguistic features of their source texts with different significances. Centres need to make sure that they are working from the most recent specification to ensure that their candidates are appropriately prepared for the specific focus on representation that is required.

Very few Investigations based on only two texts were seen; this is a rubric infringement and should be strongly discouraged. The majority of candidates chose three, an appropriate number for texts of substance and sophistication. It is also important that analyses are balanced in length. There was a tendency among weaker candidates to present one or two longer analyses, with the remaining text(s) covered very skimpily; this has virtually the same effect as only selecting two texts for analysis.

Occasionally, four or five shorter texts (newspaper editorials, for example) were used in order to include a wider spread of representations. To avoid confusion, (such as with references to 'the first text', 'the second text' and so on) it is very helpful to moderators when candidates present their texts in the order of analysis, clearly labelled (and referred to in Investigations) as Text A, Text B and so on.

Candidates may be encouraged to edit lengthy texts, given the word limit; there is no need to attempt an exhaustive analysis of, say, lengthy feature articles. From the moderator's (and teacher's) point of view, it is helpful if quotations are highlighted on data or even line-referenced. The accuracy of labelling is time-consuming to check in lengthy texts without these indicators. It is very important that such checks take place. In a small minority of cases, where a candidate had seriously misinterpreted and misrepresented the argument of a source text, there was no indication that this had been noted by the centre.

A small number of candidates continue to present three separate analyses as one investigation. This, again, is to be discouraged; in such cases the tendency is towards repetitive analysis with no clear line of argument about the subject represented. More successful investigations created effective links between source texts which generally added depth to their analysis.

Differentiation for AO3 is affected by the degree of candidates' engagement with ideas, issues and meanings, as well as their grasp of writers' strategies and techniques, used to fulfil identified purposes for a clearly-defined audience. There is still a tendency, even among the most able students, to make sweeping, unsupported assertions about audiences, based on stereotypical assumptions. Thus, readers of *The Mirror* are working class males, readers of *The Guardian* are intellectuals and readers of *The Times* are businessmen. Such assumptions can result in blinkered analyses of texts which did not fit the stereotype. More subtle and more effective Investigations looked closely at how the writer's language choices and tone constructed the intended audience.

Weaker analyses used a limited critical vocabulary for semantic effects, often just the two adjectives 'negative' or 'positive', rather than searching for more precisely defined expressions. For grammatical features, weaker responses relied on pre-prepared, formulaic effects, so that any complex sentence was said to add extra information, any compound one added balance and any simple one either created impact or was easier to read. Without further development, these effects fail to make any distinction between texts and give no sense of a particular text's ideology, bias or purposes. Similarly, any first person plural pronoun was said to demonstrate inclusivity; however, a politician who uses 'we' in a speech may use it to mean 'we, the government', 'we, the British people', 'we, living in the Western world', or even 'we, in this room'; a more subtle analysis will unpick these different meanings in more detail and then comment on effects.

More effective analyses used a wider vocabulary to define effects precisely. In terms of high-scoring grammatical features, candidates chose one or two significant sentences to demonstrate the particular effects of, for example, marked themes, lengthy noun phrases, embedded or comment clauses. The particular impact of a sentence was usefully characterised with an adjective or two.

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

Increasingly, candidates are aware of the need to demonstrate a range of linguistic knowledge in their investigations. Typically, this includes some lexical or semantic points, key word classes, often in detail, and engagement with aspects of clause and sentence structure. In successful Investigations, such linguistic features are linked precisely to one or more aspects of representation. Credit will be limited for labelling features, however accurately, that make no contribution to representation. Candidates should also note that limited credit is likely to be given for phonological or graphological points and select features for analysis accordingly.

Frequent labelling errors also limit the AO1 mark, although an occasional slip is unlikely to have a significant effect. Some candidates continue to confuse noun and pronoun, first, second and third person, adjective and adverb, present tense and present continuous aspect, auxiliary and main verbs. Plenty of practice with a range of texts, as well as careful re-drafting and proofreading, should enable most candidates to eliminate such errors and confusion. Moderators noted, once more, a number of candidates whose linguistic labels were not clearly linked to a specific example, so that no AO1 credit could be given. Candidates who were more careful about including quotations tended to use underlining of words, phrases or clauses to ensure that the example was precisely defined.

In this series, there was less evidence of poor quality of writing; the majority of Investigations seen by moderators were appropriately expressed and accurately written. Spelling of linguistic terms also seemed to show an improvement. A few candidates struggled to express effects of linguistic features; expressions such as 'grabs the attention' or 'improves the flow' need to be avoided and more specific effects described. Quite a number of candidates struggled to make their points concisely, an important skill to practise when writing within a word limit. The most successful candidates presented a dense analysis, in which almost every sentence contained a credit-worthy feature or idea.

The best investigations were carefully structured and guided readers. An overview of the context for the representation was given at the start, sources used were briefly identified and a short summary given of the content of each one. Weaker investigations lacked any overview or introduction and were poorly paragraphed, failing to establish a clear line of argument.

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
- used a minimum of three texts and a maximum of five
- edited lengthy texts, clearly labelled as A, B, etc and highlighted quotations
- began with an overview which showed awareness of contexts and wider representational issues
- looked closely at the writer-reader relationship and did not judge audience on pre-conceived ideas about readership
- skilfully linked together the analyses of source texts to create a coherent and well-structured argument
- illustrated their points with brief quotations and used a varied linguistic register
- analysed a range of carefully selected linguistic features, significant for representation, from each text, underlining examples, where necessary, to avoid ambiguity
- used a varied critical vocabulary and explored effects in detail.

Less successful candidates:
- did not focus on representation or lacked a clear representational focus
- selected too few or overlong sources
- chose bland or very similar sources, which limited analytical potential
- began their analyses abruptly, without commenting on contexts, sources, audiences or purposes
- made sweeping assertions about audience
- wrote three or four unconnected analyses, with repetitive identification of similar features in each one
- used no or overlong quotations, without identifying linguistic features precisely
- produced unbalanced investigations, in which one or more sources were analysed only superficially
- lacked a suitable critical vocabulary and relied on formulaic expressions for effects.

**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

More centres are adopting the idea of using a cover sheet for the Production piece. This enables students to identify clearly their representational focus, intended publication/context of use, genre and audience, generally with a positive effect on candidates' writing. In some cases, the use of a front sheet might have drawn attention to an injudicious choice of subject, for example instances in which candidates tended to reproduce, rather than challenge, an existing representation, usually of a celebrity. This led to predictable texts written in derivative language, often relying on extensive factual information which could only be second-hand. Candidates in this position need to consider their choices more carefully.

A number of Production pieces lacked an effective title. Moderators noted a significant number of texts which had either no title or were simply labelled 'Production piece' or, even worse (because it implies no sort of context at all) 'Creative Writing'. In such cases, the chosen genre was not at all clear to moderators, who had to turn to the Commentary in hope of an explanation. Some journalistic pieces also omitted other formal features, such as sub-editorial introductions, identification of the writer and his/her role, sub-headings, captions for images, and so on.

More successful pieces chose subjects with a fresher appeal or presented a well-argued challenge to conventional thinking. Positive representations, apart from the usual defence of a lengthy list of famous media favourites, included the fashion industry, football as a national treasure, the value of social networking and the role of women in broadcast media. These were all designed as newspaper or magazine articles.

Negative representations seemed to be greater in number. Successful topics for articles included: a questioning of the value of mass recycling; British attitudes towards and treatment of immigrants; going to university. The blog, a problematic modern genre in terms of conventions (since it seems to have few) was nevertheless interestingly used to explore a range of young people's attitudes to political issues and religious intolerance. The vast majority of entries were feature articles. There were also some monologues with varying degrees of success. One interesting use of this form involved a first-person account of post-natal depression, for use in a healthcare DVD for sufferers. Some centres opted exclusively for speeches for student debates

on a range of topics. It is possible that these may actually have taken place, which would seem a very useful way of harnessing students' enthusiasms to their writing task.

Successful candidates wrote in a genre whose conventions were known to them and in which they were confident in terms of strategies and techniques. Weaker candidates, even those who were able to reproduce formal features of layout and graphology fairly competently, struggled with more demanding aspects of content, such as constructing a balanced and coherent argument or creating a believable character or representation. Where these difficulties were accompanied, as tended to be the case, with flaws in expression, accuracy and fluency, marks were severely limited.

Occasionally, pieces which were designed to challenge the stereotype of one social group fell into the trap of stereotyping another. Some positive representations of teenagers, for example, a popular topic, represented adults in general as baffled or outraged by new technology, out of touch with popular culture or jealously guarding their power and privileges. In a few cases, the representation being argued against did not clearly exist, but was simply asserted in order to be challenged. Such pieces tended to use tactics which would likely alienate their intended audiences, such as lecturing them in a strident tone, accusing them of unworthy behaviour or representing them as selfish and uncaring. Successful pieces tackled representations which were shown to exist, had a more objective and balanced view and produced more subtle arguments.

In terms of style, there was an over-reliance on rhetorical features in some pieces, even those intended as speeches for a debate. Ponderous and redundant expressions such as 'I hear you cry' and 'at this moment in time' or long strings of rhetorical questions tend to undermine the persuasive intention. Some monologues tended either to be written in a flat, unappealing style, for purposes of realism, or else were compromised, in terms of form, by melodrama being substituted for perceptive understanding of human character and motivation.

C: Commentary

Surprising errors or omissions still occasionally limited candidates' marks. Apparent articles were referred to in commentaries as editorials, even though the use of first person, page layout and style all strongly implied they were not. And texts with no heading (other than 'Representation Production'), sub-editorial introduction, named writer or paragraphing were sometimes referred to as articles, although it was not clear from the texts themselves.

More frequently omitted was a context of use for the text produced, even a generalised one, such as 'a women's magazine' or 'a magazine for sports fans'. More experienced readers were able to pinpoint precisely where their intended text might appear, though their writing skills were not always equal to the task they had set themselves. In a few cases, where the text seemed to be a monologue or dramatic script, there was no indication whether this was to be published or performed and, if the latter, whether it was for radio, theatre or alternative venue.

A few candidates produced commentaries which were considerably longer than their Production pieces, or even rivalled their Investigations in length. This extra work is unnecessary: the commentary cannot, within the word limit, be an exhaustive analysis of every aspect of the Production piece. Its function is to define the representational subject and purposes, the context of use for the text produced, and demonstrate the candidates' awareness of how they have used key language features to shape the responses of their chosen audience.

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

Moderators reported a number of late entries and withdrawals this time, as well as parcels arriving well after entry deadlines. It is likely that the December snows had a part to play in this, as in so much else, by causing schools and colleges to close for an inconvenient number of days. Those centres that sent their entries in before the Christmas period, therefore, are to be especially congratulated. Moderators' deadlines do not change with the weather, unfortunately, so it is important that specified dates are adhered to, as far as possible.

Nearly all centres sent Centre Declaration Sheets and Candidate Record Forms with candidates' work. These are necessary for candidates to confirm, with their signature, the circumstances in which the work was produced and for centres to identify the teacher(s) supervising candidates. Moderation is unable to proceed without this information, so omission of the form causes a delay to the process.

Internal cover sheets on candidates' work continued to be productively used (and much appreciated by moderators) to clarify candidates' intentions and to highlight changes of mark as a result of internal moderation. In a few cases, such changes were not also made on the Candidate Record Form, with the risk of candidates being given an incorrect mark if their folders were not part of the moderator's sample.

The majority of centres use simple, open-sided plastic folders for candidates' work, which are much less unwieldy than plastic pockets. In a very few cases, work was submitted as a collection of loose sheets, which is inadvisable.

**Summary of Key Advice**

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

a) General
- discuss with candidates at the start of coursework preparation appropriate choices of topic for representation
- 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, edit or extend their work
- familiarise candidates with marking grid descriptors
- annotate candidates' work thoroughly to identify strengths and weaknesses, so that moderators are able to understand the rationale for marks given
- show the breakdown of marks awarded for AO4A, 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 assessors' comments as well as candidates' titles or topics, sources used for investigation, context of use and audience for production
- remember to include a Centre Declaration Sheet.

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.