



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**English Language A**

**ENGA1**

**(Specification 2700)**

**Unit 1: Seeing Through Language**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General

This is the eighth series of 'Seeing through Language' and examiners were pleased to report that all three questions enabled students to demonstrate an appropriate range and depth of skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to the Unit's Assessment Objectives.

Question One required students to analyse two texts: a personal account of a gap year experience from *The Guardian* and a discussion about volunteering and its associated costs from a *gapyear.com* message board. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, students were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing and illustrating key features of semantics, grammar, syntax and discourse. To access the higher mark ranges for AO3i (mode), students were expected to identify and explore the main mode characteristics of the texts such as channel, synchronicity, proximity, permanence, immediacy, planning and interactivity. To access the higher mark ranges for AO3ii (meaning), students were expected to identify and explore contextual features such as purposes, participant positioning, functions, tenor, topics, topic management and structure. Students were also expected to examine effects of language features and various meanings and representations, both literal and pragmatic, constructed by the writer of Text A and the participants in Text B.

Tasks 

0	2
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 and 

0	4
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 required students to study a data set related to children's acquisition of either speech or writing and comment linguistically on five different features of language which they found of interest. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1 students were expected to identify these features precisely and name them linguistically.

Tasks 

0	3
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 and 

0	5
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 required students to write an answer on either the extent to which children acquire language in their own individual way or the main problems that children face when learning to write. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, students were expected to spell and punctuate correctly, write in complete sentences, use an accurate linguistic register, express their ideas fluently and structure their answers cohesively. To access the higher mark ranges for AO2, students were expected to demonstrate understanding of and an ability to integrate and evaluate language issues, theories, research and debates as well as examining appropriate linguistic features and contexts.

There is a lot of information in this paper for students to assimilate and it is recommended that they spend 30 minutes reading the questions and data in order to prepare and plan their answers thoroughly. There is a parity of marks between the two sections and students should spend 45 minutes answering each question. It is important for students to realise that the data analysis in tasks 02 and 04 of Questions 2 and 3 carries a maximum of 10 marks out of the question total of 45. Given this proportion, students should spend no more than ten minutes analysing the data and make five precise points.

## Section A – Language and Mode

### Question 1 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 1 | |---|---|

Both texts for analysis proved to be very accessible. It was clear to examiners that students were familiar with both the personal narrative of Text A and the online sharing of facts and opinions of Text B. There was a wealth of linguistic, modal and contextual features in both texts for students to make purposeful and perceptive comments.

The most successful students identified and described grammatical features such as types of adjectives and adverbs, verb tenses, aspects and modality. These students also explored syntax by describing sentence types, clause types, clause elements and clause linking.

The most successful students offered a conceptualised overview of mode by discussing elements of written mode (standard and non-standard), visual channels, asynchronicity and tenses, degrees of interactivity (turns, links, replies, questions and answers), shared contexts and interests, inclusiveness, textual cohesion and intertextuality. In Text B these students explored the relationship between comments of posters and surrounding texts and the delay in posters' responses. These most successful students explored particular mode issues in detail, for example conceptualisations of permanence which considered not simply whether the texts would continue to exist but whether they would be available and anyone would consult them. Many of these students made some interesting points about audiences seeking out online texts rather than encountering them by chance. Some also observed that readers using mobile devices may prefer to read shorter texts. The analysis of the message board was generally very confident, and students were able to differentiate between the contributors in terms of formality and planning. Some students even explored the possibility that the final post was generated by a company rather than an individual.

The most successful students demonstrated clear understanding of how contexts and situations shaped the meanings created by and within each text. In Text A they explored the writer's use of direct address and rhetorical strategies such as humour - 'late night Korma' - to inform and persuade without patronising while still establishing and maintaining reassuring authority. They also explored representations of Travellers Worldwide, First City magazine, student lifestyle and the moral worth and possibilities for self-development offered by gap year experience. In Text B they explored various views of volunteering and the companies offering places as well as the three participants' creation of online identities. In both texts the most successful students explored self-representations, effects of clause types, tenses and modality in creating representations of commercialism, travel, volunteering, pleasure and social responsibility.

Most students were able to identify some word classes and many described types of nouns and pronouns. Sentence functions were usually identified accurately but sentence and clause types less frequently. The description of graphology was generally accurate and productive. Most students made some clear comments on mode by considering degrees of planning and organisation, markers of spoken mode, visual design, personal address and degrees of permanence. Most students had no difficulty in identifying Text A as written and electronic but disappointingly few discussed the level of interactivity in the text. Most students showed understanding of the purposes of the writer of Text A to inform her audience about her experience of taking a gap year and to persuade them of the personal benefits which outweigh problems such as cost. In Text B, most students examined the purposes of the participants to exchange information and opinions about volunteering. Many students were able to explore the audience of both texts in detail, discussing the dual audience of students and their parents for Text A and participants and deliberate or casual readers in Text B. Most students identified some specific information, ideas and opinions about gap years, eg companies and cost, and acknowledged the personal and anecdotal accounts of gap year experiences in both texts.

Less successful students made broad assertions about the texts, often without proof or exemplification. These students were only able to identify some graphological features, one or two pronouns or one or two semantic and/or phonological features. Some students offered narrative commentaries on the texts, sometimes including unanalysed quotations with little attention to meanings or effects.

The most successful students:

- began with an over-view of contexts, modes and topics, thus supplying a framework which informed subsequent analysis of language features
- identified clause types such as conditional clauses and relative clauses accurately

- commented successfully on the functions and effects of these clause types
- gave detailed attention to the variety of sentence types by accurately identifying minor, simple, compound and complex sentences and explaining their effects clearly
- made productive observations about the structural features of the texts, commenting on the use of paragraphs, adjacency pairs, discourse markers and the organisation of topics and themes
- gave a perceptive account of register focusing not only on lexical choices but also on interactive features (eg greetings, address, synthetic personalisation)
- identified a wide range of word class types (eg abstract nouns, adverbs of manner, comparative adjectives, co-ordinating conjunctions, dynamic and stative verbs)
- discussed the use of a range of adjective types in both texts, including superlative and attributive adjectives such as 'best' and 'fantastic', to emphasise the representations of the gap year experience
- commented successfully on the strategic use of modality within the texts
- conceptualised characteristics of mode in terms of such factors as channel, synchronicity, immediacy, proximity, permanence, interactivity and planning
- linked the identification of features in Text A to mode and effects, eg formal lexis and chronological structure in Text A were linked to planning
- differentiated the participants in Text B in terms of their opinions, self-representations and creation of online identities
- explored different degrees of spontaneity in Text B
- explored interactive features such as turns, tabs and hyperlinks
- examined the visual features and design of both texts as part of the creation of meanings
- considered the use and effects of rhetorical devices such as triadic structures and rhetorical questions
- examined the contribution of metaphors such as 'infancy' to the creation of meanings
- considered the explanatory use of parenthesis (eg similar placements...plus flights)
- examined representations of cost, commercialism, travel, volunteering, pleasure, moral worth and possibilities for self-development
- examined humour as a strategy to represent student life (eg 'late night korma')
- explored Lisa Batchelor's self-representation as a sympathetic and authoritative writer
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically.

Less successful students:

- only identified graphology, complexity and formality
- named language features without exemplification
- identified all questions as rhetorical
- made frequent basic errors which hindered clear communication.

### **Advice to students**

#### **Do:**

- begin your answer with an overview of context, modes and topic
- plan and structure your answer systematically using topic paragraphs
- identify key language features using appropriate linguistic terms
- explain how these features contribute to the construction of meanings
- explicitly examine and comment on the mode features of the texts.

#### **Don't:**

- write about only one of the texts
- paraphrase the content of the texts
- neglect to comment on mode, meanings and effects of language features.

## Section B – Language Development

### Question 2 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 2 | |---|---|

Examiners reported that many students were very well prepared for this component and were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Many students clearly identified features such as: ellipsis – ‘am the showman’, declarative mood – ‘these are the prizes’, independent clause – ‘these are the prizes’, non-standard superlative adjective – ‘bestest’, standard tense and aspect formation – ‘who’s being the goodest girl (.) who’s been the the goodest girl’, non-standard negation – ‘I not think’, role of care-giver (questioning) – ‘who’s been the best girl’, role of care-giver (correction) – ‘it’s not the goodest (.) it’s the best’ and the imaginative semantic context of role-play ‘am the showman’.

The most successful students:

- identified accurately five clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately
- quoted the example of each feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of each feature.

Less successful students:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- wrote only about perceived errors
- speculated about the speakers’ meaning rather than describing the language.

### Question 2 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 3 | |---|---|

Examiners noted that this question produced some highly knowledgeable, detailed and sustained answers. The most successful students explicitly explored the extent to which children acquire language in their own individual way. They accomplished this by maintaining a clear focus on the existence of universal stages and patterns (grammatical and pre-linguistic stages, regression, early word classes, stages of question or negative formation etc.) and individual differences in the relative rates of grammatical and semantic acquisition within those patterns. These students made good use of Nativist and Cognitive theories and discussed the variability of adult input. They also evaluated the importance of social interaction, Child Directed Speech, Language Acquisition Support Systems, Zone of Proximal Development, the significance of correction and functional explanations of language development. These most successful students supported their answers by referring to the theories and research of Bruner, Snow, Halliday, Nelson, Aitchison and Brown. These most successful students also examined a range of examples of semantic and grammatical features and functions, eg word classes, word order, grammatical function words, morphology, affixation, negation, tense, plurality, over-generalisation, types of over-extension (categorical, analogical and statement) and question formation. In addition to maintaining a focus on social interactionist theory, these most successful students considered the relative merits of innatist, cognitive and behaviourist theories of language development and evaluated these theories critically.

Most students demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without evaluation of their relative merits and with insufficient focus on the extent to which children acquire language in their own individual way. Most students offered only one or two examples of children’s language. Examiners commented that it was pleasing to see many students making productive use of examples from question 02 in their answers.

Less successful students struggled to address the question at all and tended to give narrative accounts of particularly harrowing and often conflated tales of dog girls and chicken boys, but didn't really explain much about how language acquisition could be seen as individual. A significant minority of students didn't answer the specific 03 question but based their answer entirely on the data in 02 which severely limited their achievement for AO2. It is essential that students are made aware that tasks 02 and 03 should be answered separately.

The most successful students:

- explored the extent to which children acquire language in their own individual way
- explored in detail the nature of acquisition as an active and deductive process (discussing in detail over-generalisation, regression, overextension etc)
- explored all levels of language development (grammar/syntax, lexis/semantics, phonology, pragmatics)
- drew on personal experiences (eg siblings, cousins), linked them to the question and demonstrated their contribution to the discussion of language development
- critically evaluated the role of caregivers and the influence of the social environment by drawing on Katherine Nelson for the composition of the early productive vocabulary
- examined the significance of some rules and principles applied by children, eg tense formation and plurality by examining Berko and Brown's 'wug' research
- discussed the effect of correction by examining Jean Berko Gleason's 'fis' experiment
- explored the ideas of researchers such as Chomsky, Pinker, Brown, Halliday, Nelson, Lenneberg and Berko to explain children's individual and universal language development
- explained and evaluated ideas such as the Zone of Proximal Development, Child Directed Speech, the Language Acquisition Device and the Language Acquisition Support System
- wrote well-structured answers which had a logical line of argument, debated the various theories, and gave a clear overview of the student's own perspectives.

Less successful students:

- wrote general essays outlining theories about child language acquisition without specific attention to the extent to which children acquire language in their own individual way
- identified very few features of children's language
- offered a brief and broad account of stages of development, especially pre-verbal stages
- gave disproportionate attention to feral children
- confused the ideas of different researchers and theorists
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

### **Advice to students**

**Do:**

- read the question carefully and identify the issues to which it refers
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses these issues
- examine some key features of children's language acquisition
- examine and evaluate research findings and theory, evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

**Don't:**

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- summarise a range of research superficially with no reference to the question
- agree with contradictory theories
- neglect to include examples of children's language.

**Question 3**

0	4
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Most students were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Many students clearly identified features such as: independent clause – 'he was a dreamer', third person narrative – 'he painted all One side yollow', non-standard spelling – 'yollow', 'geen', non-standard capitalisation '...Paint. he painted ....', spatial dimensions of early writing – various letter sizes, reversed letters – 'Job', 'the', 'breamed' past tense – 'he painted', interaction – the teacher ticks the work, correct spelling of specific features – 'ladders and buckets', aspects of narrative – linear, sequential, imaginative, extended narrative context – 'Chaptar 1', conventional narrative beginning – 'One day ...', narrative linked to drawing and aspects of narrative structure – characterisation, orientation, complication, plot development, coda.

The most successful students:

- identified accurately five clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately in the layout of their answer
- quoted the example of each feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of each feature.

Less successful students:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- wrote only about perceived errors
- failed to give examples of features they were identifying.

**Question 3**

0	5
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The most successful students explicitly explored the main problems that children face when learning to write. They accomplished this by maintaining a clear focus on links between speech and writing, semantic relations, motor skills, the relationship between phonemes and graphemes and rules and principles applied by children, eg word order, negation, agreement of word classes, tense and sentence boundaries. These students explored written language acquisition as an active and deductive process, eg experimentation, the role of correction, the impact of new technologies, eg keyboards, different forms of writing and their contexts, eg diaries. The most successful students referred confidently to the work of other researchers such as Vann, Clay and Vygotsky and clearly identified and evaluated a variety of written acquisition models such as cognitive, physiological, interactional, experimental and developmental. These students also examined and evaluated Kroll's preparatory, consolidation, differentiation, integration stages and Barclay's scribbling, mock letters, conventional letters, phonetic spelling and correct spelling stages. These students also examined the contribution of reading, drawing and narrative to the development of writing skills. The most successful students discussed the need to understand the grapheme/phoneme relationship and referred to research by Bell, strategies employed in the classroom – phonics/whole word issue, correction and whether it can hinder writing. They also included good examples of actual writing produced by children in their answers.

Most students showed some awareness of the importance of speech and reading in



children's acquisition of writing skills and examined features of handwriting, spelling and punctuation as well as giving a general account of one or two stages of written acquisition.

Less successful students found difficulty in relating the issues specified in the question to anything within their knowledge or experience. These students either applied generic theory models from initial spoken acquisition or discussed, very narrowly, the imitation model.

The most successful students:

- examined and evaluated the most important factors influencing children's written language acquisition
- made productive links between the acquisition of speech and the development of writing
- considered writing as representing imaginative and communicative power
- explored a substantial and varied range of examples of genres of children's writing including various narrative forms
- evaluated critically research and theories about stages of acquisition of writing skills such as those posited by Kroll and Barclay
- explored a substantial and varied range of examples of children's writing including syntax, grammar, semantic relations, orthography
- evolved a view of the nature of written language acquisition as an interactive, developmental and inventive process
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically and offering a well-crafted line of argument.

Less successful students:

- demonstrated little or no understanding of the process of written language acquisition
- drew only on theories of spoken language development
- offered few examples of children's writing, or in some cases none at all
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

### **Advice to students**

**Do:**

- read the question carefully and identify the issues to which it refers
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses these issues
- examine some key relevant features of children's written language acquisition such as formation of letter symbols, punctuation using correct linguistic terminology
- evaluate research findings and theory by evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

**Don't:**

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- use research and theory about the acquisition of speech
- discount the importance of individual learning in the context of stages of written acquisition.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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