



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

**English Language A**

**ENGA2**

**(Specification 2700)**

**Unit 2: Representation and Language**

***Report on the Examination***

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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## **General**

Moderators noted the increasing range of topics for both Investigation and Production, many of them featuring significant people, issues and events of the past year. Many students focused confidently on representation, the concept at the heart of both tasks, in their analysis of source texts and, in their Investigations, were able to select an appropriate range of linguistic features to demonstrate how the representations were constructed by the writers of these texts; Productions similarly foregrounded new or challenging representations and Commentaries provided for them a clear rationale, supported by specific examples of linguistic strategies used and their intended effects. Where representation was not the central focus, or was not made sufficiently clear to moderators, marks were inevitably affected.

For those aiming to achieve high marks, the unit presents a range of significant challenges, in terms of presenting sophisticated linguistic knowledge and demonstrating advanced analytical and writing skills. Nor should the challenge for teachers be underestimated; their task is, in different ways, equally demanding. For large schools and colleges, the workload is daunting and moderators appreciated the careful and detailed preparation of folders that made their own roles more straightforward. Many schools and colleges are to be congratulated on the accuracy of their assessments, based on confident understanding of all aspects of the unit, linked to perceptive and often skilful evaluation of their students' folders of work.

This report aims to provide an overview of the coursework submitted this summer, what was successful as well as what was less so, with the ultimate aim of avoiding potential problems in the future. It is hoped that the information and advice given below will be of interest even to experienced teachers and useful to those encountering the unit for the first time.

## **Representation Investigation**

A few schools and colleges allow students to exceed the word limit, sometimes substantially so, in Commentaries as well as Investigations. In general, this should be avoided; part of the challenge of these tasks is to demonstrate the ability to create complete and convincing pieces of work within the specified constraints. While there is no automatic deduction of marks for excessive length, it is often caused by weaknesses in structure or expression: redundancy, repetition, or verbosity, that attentive editing might remove.

There were other length-related problems: a small number of students presented only one or two texts for analysis, rather than the specification requirement for between three and five texts. The resulting work tended to be self-limiting in terms of range and depth. Some students submitted very lengthy source texts, even though very little of this material was used in their analyses. It would be helpful if texts could be edited to a reasonable length and images deleted before submission.

Even more important, for ease of moderation, is the need to include source texts in the order in which they are analysed and to label them clearly, either with the name of the publication or as Text A, B, C and so on. In some cases, there was no means of identifying which text was which, which made it difficult for moderators to verify the accuracy of linguistic labelling and interpretation. Well-organised students often highlighted chosen quotations on the source texts, which was helpful to moderators.

A small number of students failed to submit the texts upon which their analyses were based; where quotations were brief and decontextualised, it was very difficult for moderators to check accuracy for both AO1 and AO3.

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

There was a very wide range of choices for representation, featuring mainly individuals, but also social groups, events and issues. Individuals tended to be those currently in the limelight: celebrities, politicians, actors, presenters, musicians, footballers and members of the royal family. From the last of these, the Queen received attention in this Jubilee year, as did the monarchy in general; those fascinated by Kate Middleton struggled to find differences of opinion about her impact on the public. David Cameron and Nick Clegg remained popular choices, as did Barack Obama; only a tiny minority, interestingly, chose to focus on European public figures.

Of those students who opted to investigate current issues and debates, such as tuition fees, benefits caps, euthanasia and abortion, a number lost sight of the need to focus on how these issues were being represented in source texts and simply gave an illustrated summary of pro- and anti- arguments. This is a subtle distinction that students need to consider carefully, before making a final choice of topic.

Among celebrities, an obvious and popular choice was Amy Winehouse, whose controversial life and early death were often examined in a variety of texts over a period of time. Media coverage of Whitney Houston, Steve Jobs and Christopher Hitchens also led to some thoughtful pieces on the ways their lives were characterised before and after their deaths. In criminal cases, Amanda Knox continued to attract interest, as did Anders Breivik. Michael Jackson fans turned their attention to Conrad Murray, Jackson's doctor, but often struggled to focus on representation rather than simply the drama of the events themselves.

The danger, for students choosing an individual in whom they have a particular interest, is that they fail to appreciate that the focus needs to be on writers' strategies and techniques, as much as the individuals written about. Those who wrote about footballers, for example, often had strong opinions about content, but limited appreciation of the style in which controversies were reported or the strategies used to shape readers' responses. Very few Investigations were able to explore the implicit ideological basis for writers' representations, the majority tending to rely on broad generalisations about particular publications' political allegiances.

A popular social group was the Dale Farm travellers, although students who chose similar reports about them struggled to find a clear line of argument. Representation of teenagers continues to be a popular subject; here, problems were sometimes caused by data that ranged too widely over a range of issues (teenage pregnancies, binge drinking/eating, mangling of the English language and general behaviour in riots); these were hard to compare, offering too much material with too many variables.

Among events, the riots of last summer continued to interest many students. The Olympics also featured prominently, with sporting idealism contrasted with consideration of enormous costs and inconvenience. Here, Investigations often benefited from a range of sources to provide fresh perspectives. Successful Investigations tended to juxtapose local and international reports, as well as personal blogs and discussions.

A good example was the representation of the proposed HS2 rail line, where students included reports from local newspapers and websites with special interests (such as *Construction News* or *Network Rail*) to consider alongside articles from national newspapers. Similarly, *The Telegraph's* coverage of recent disputes over the status of the Falkland Islands was interestingly compared to an Argentinian Press website. Another valuable data set included a sceptical account of NHS reforms from *The Guardian* and the Department of

Health's far more positive overview on its website. It is encouraging to think that English Language students go out into the world of spin, propaganda and political bias (both for and against the Establishment) well-prepared to read between the lines and distinguish fact from opinion, genuine neutrality from subtle bias.

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

This assessment objective is concerned with an ascending scale of linguistic terminology and writing skills. Many students aimed for top-band marks by identifying a range of sentence and clause types. Unfortunately, many of the descriptions were inaccurate. Short sentences are not necessarily simple; minor sentences are not declarative; the use of 'and' doesn't automatically indicate a compound sentence; and general claims about the incidence of such sentences will not be credited without specific examples. More importantly, the effectiveness of linguistic descriptions is dependent on their significance for representation. Some students, in their eagerness to demonstrate knowledge of linguistic terminology, lost sight of the meanings under investigation and, in many cases, made repetitive points about different examples of the same linguistic feature.

Successful students, conscious of word limits but aware of the need to demonstrate knowledge of a range of linguistic features, selected their examples very carefully and added succinct comments on representational effects (thereby gaining credit on AO3, as well). Knowing, too, that an isolated example is not always enough to prove a point, they selected several examples of, say, adjectives, verbs or abstract nouns to support a general point about how a representation was constructed but made the point only once. Rather than simply labelling a sentence type and adding a generalised comment about its broad function, they looked at its constituent elements and noted, for example, the precise effects of a fronted adverbial clause, a passive verb phrase or postmodified noun phrase. The best Investigations confidently integrated language and meanings (implicit as well as explicit) and were shrewd and perceptive about text, context and sub-text.

Less ambitious students adopted one of a number of limited strategies: they stuck to a small range of familiar features, mainly lexical and semantic; at the other extreme, they scattered labels throughout their analyses, in the hope that some might turn out to be correct; or else, aware of their own uncertainty, they avoided terminology altogether and simply referred to 'words'. Such attempts could only receive limited credit. Many errors were not only incorrect, but highly unlikely ('without' as a verb, 'however' as a noun), suggesting that practice in classifying word classes and syntax would benefit many coursework folders.

Widespread errors continue to be made in the labelling of verb tense and, in particular, aspect, with many students unable to distinguish between non-finite participles and finite continuous verb phrases. Some students made errors about features which were not shown to be significant for representation: transitive and intransitive verbs were such a feature this year. Many identified 'more' and 'most' as adjectives, when used to form comparatives and superlatives. There were some confused labels: collective pronouns, imperative statements, present tense nouns, which careful proofreading might have eliminated.

Marks for AO1, therefore, need to reflect a balance between range and depth of knowledge, on the one hand, with labelling errors, on the other. Some students who were awarded a top band mark, for example, made too many errors, often apparently unnoticed by school/college markers, to be securely placed at the top of the mark range. In some cases, errors were ticked or accurate descriptions crossed as errors; it is important that linguistic descriptions are accurate and, if not, clearly indicated to ensure that they are considered in the assessment of overall competence. A few students were disproportionately penalised for

errors in top-band descriptors, when there was a full range of accurate identifications of detailed word classes.

The effective use of quotations is a skill that continues to elude many less able students, who either quote a whole sentence or phrase to illustrate a single word class (leaving the accuracy in question) or quote isolated words to illustrate a complex idea about representation. In order to be convincing, quotations need to be briefly contextualised and shown to be significant; practice in writing analytical sentences as part of first-draft preparation might be beneficial.

General accuracy and quality of expression may affect whether a student is placed at the top or bottom of a band. Here, too, proofreading may make a difference to mistakes such as ‘miner sentence’, ‘adverb of manor’ and ‘premedication’ of noun phrases.

Successful students:

- had a clear representational topic, linked to wider issues about social values and attitudes
- 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 them 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 points with brief, contextualised quotations and used a varied linguistic register
- analysed a range of carefully selected linguistic features, significant for representation, from each text, underlining examples to avoid ambiguity
- used a varied critical vocabulary and explored effects in detail.

Less successful students:

- 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
- made frequent errors of linguistic description
- 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**

This year, most students fulfilled the requirement of the specification with regard to representation and foregrounded this central issue both in their Production and the accompanying commentary. Successful Productions created an original representation or challenged an existing one. The topic choice, in some cases, was directly linked to the Investigation, often productively, as long as the focus was significantly different from those in the source texts used in the first task.

Overall, there was a huge variety of topic choices, ranging from the weighty and serious (conservation, depression, prisons) to apparently lighthearted topics (seagulls, redheads, identical twins) but which offered opportunities to challenge or dispel common prejudices.

There were some innovative challenges (for example, to the widespread view that Facebook is an unqualified boon to its users), although some attacks on public figures, such as the Duchess of Cambridge, seemed more like a personal vendetta than a thoughtful review of how such individuals have been overpraised by sycophantic media. The most popular choices continue to be media and sporting personalities, especially when involved in scandals. More thoughtful texts examined such individuals in terms of their impact on social attitudes and public values, questioning or affirming them as role models, or assessing the extent to which a nation is defined by its choice of celebrities.

In terms of events, last summer's riots and this year's tuition fee protests featured strongly. Those who chose to write about the Olympics tended to focus on cost and disruption, unimpressed by all the hype. Most of these subjects were dealt with in feature articles intended for a variety of newspapers and magazines, the best of them very well suited to their context in terms of content, tone and sense of audience.

A few Productions lost sight of the intended representational subject in their attempts to fulfil other purposes. Charity leaflets, for example, can work well to challenge the idea that poverty is a concept and a condition relevant only to Africa, not the U.K., but often focused simply on making emotional appeals for public donations. Other leaflets and advertisements which claimed to represent various events and institutions: gyms, skiing holidays, popular resorts and so on, were generally highly formulaic and dependent on existing texts for information, style and form.

If the intended publication is a specialist magazine, it is helpful to include a style model, since some gaming or music reviews can be so formulaic that an original and innovative style is hard to achieve. By including (and reflecting on) the standard format, students could show that they have altered or gone beyond it, not simply replicated it.

A small minority of students ignored the requirement to produce a written text and attempted to produce transcriptions of spoken language. These would have been more acceptable if presented as scripted material to be broadcast or performed. However, those who did opt for language written but intended to be spoken, such as speeches or monologues, sometimes created powerful texts but in a vacuum, with no sense of where they would be delivered or performed or who the likely audience would be. A few students chose to write poetry, usually for children, but found this less easy to do well than they had perhaps imagined. Even more problematic were extracts from personal diaries, with no accompanying explanation of how or where they might be published, or who would be interested in reading them. One or two

attempted to get round the difficulty by adopting celebrity personas, such as the Queen or David Cameron. Where the intentions were purely satirical, this could work well, but otherwise the texts lacked authenticity and would be unlikely to achieve publication. One or two extracts from graphic novels were highly polished in terms of design and use of form, but included only minimal textual content, which failed to establish a clear representational focus.

### **B: Style and Structure**

The most successful Productions matched their style to their choices of publication, topic, audience and purpose. There were numerous examples of inventive, witty, original, or passionate voices, expressed in varied, interesting ways by writers clearly aware of their specific audiences and guiding them skilfully; the resulting texts were a pleasure to read.

Less successful Productions were written either in an inappropriate style (too formal or informal, or else bland and unengaging), or tone (for example, hectoring rather than persuading their audiences). For a small but obtrusive minority of students, proof-reading remains a serious problem, to the extent that correct spelling and punctuation seem not to be considered as desirable in their writing. Frequent errors do, however, significantly undermine an argument and may even confuse the reader. Such errors as ‘curtsy’ for ‘courtesy’ or ‘defiantly’ for ‘definitely’ (the latter increasingly common) can obscure meaning and, while excusable in examinations, should be possible to correct before coursework is submitted.

### **C: Commentary**

In many cases, the commentary was the weakest aspect of Productions. All Productions are helped when they nominate an intended audience and specific context of use or publication, ideally on a cover sheet, but certainly in the commentary. Many schools and colleges now use a cover sheet similar to that required for ENGA4, which benefits students at the planning stage and teachers and moderators during assessment.

Representational issues and intentions need to be explicitly addressed in the commentary, so as to demonstrate the thinking behind the strategies and linguistic techniques used in the writing process. A clear statement at the start of the piece guards against mere feature-spotting, where the commentary becomes a fragmented list.

Many students continue to produce commentaries far in excess of the stipulated length (400 words). Often this revealed uncertainty about the purpose of the commentary, which is to justify the intended representation and explain how it has been achieved. A number of students tended to paraphrase rather than analyse their Productions or offer a series of half-formulated intentions, unsupported by any detailed reference or analysis; others attempted a line-by-line explanation of effects, with no overview of representational intentions. The best commentaries included a succinct overview of the intended representation, densely illustrated with a variety of examples. By taking full advantage of the opportunity provided in the commentary, students were able to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of representation and illustrate its construction.



Successful students:

- 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 students:

- 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 vast majority of schools and colleges submitted coursework or centre marks on time and included all relevant paperwork. In a very small number of cases, problems were caused by late entries.

Folders were generally well presented, using simple treasury tags or open-sided plastic folders to secure work. Paper clips, unless very large, were generally not strong enough to contain bulky files and had often slipped off in transit, leaving moderators with a collection of loose sheets.

Much of the work was densely annotated to illustrate strengths and weaknesses reflected in marks. Most schools and colleges included separate marks for the three aspects of AO4, which was helpful. Occasionally, there was a lack of clarity about initial marks awarded (for example, where marks were given as 4/5? + 6/7? +4 = 15?). In some cases, a new mark was agreed during internal moderation, but not always changed on the Candidate Record Form or Centre Mark Form; in others, there was no evidence of the internal moderation processes, only a mark on the CRF/CMF greater than the strand marks on the script.

## Summary of Key Advice

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

### a) General

- discuss with students at the start of coursework preparation appropriate choices of topic for representation
- advise students at first draft stage to meet length requirements as nearly as possible
- remind students at final draft stage to proofread carefully for technical and labelling errors and, if necessary, edit or extend their work
- familiarise students with marking grid descriptors
- annotate students' 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 students' 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 student name and centre number on each sheet
- remind students of appropriate fonts, layout and type size
- consider the use of internal summary sheets to show teachers' and internal moderators' comments as well as students' titles or topics, sources used for investigation, context of use and audience for production
- remember to include Centre Declaration forms.

### b) Representation Investigation

- encourage students 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 students have a clear sense of focus on representational topics and issues
- ensure students 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 students to use a range of lexical, semantic and grammatical features, noting the hierarchy of features in the marking grid for AO1.

### **c) Representation Production**

- devise strategies to minimise the risks of derivative or plagiarised work
- encourage students to consider a range of genres and writing styles in order to make a judicious choice of form for their production piece
- check that students have chosen a suitable form for the content they wish to produce
- check that students 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 students to place their representations within a wider context of social issues and to mention this briefly in the introduction to their Commentaries
- urge students 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.