



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

English Language B

ENGB1

(Specification 2705)

Unit 1: Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination

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General

More than 22,000 students took this exam in May, and senior examiners commented that the paper produced a good variety of responses across the mark range. Schools and colleges continue to prepare students well for the differing approaches necessary for each question, and students continue to approach unseen data in an open-minded way. To avoid repetition of previous advice, teachers new to this specification should access the reports written for previous examinations. All are available on e-AQA and have detailed clarification of the assessment objectives, their different weightings and how these are interpreted across the two questions.

Section A – Question 01

Senior examiners commented that students had been taught of the need to compare texts and discuss differences employing appropriate phrasing such as ‘in contrast’ and ‘similarly’. One approach was the description of a text’s inclusion within a group as ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ in their chosen grouping which often seemed to enable students to address complexities and include three or more texts within a group. No texts were avoided when grouping texts and many students included texts in more than one grouping.

Senior examiners reported that a variety of groups were offered. However, there were some more ‘popular’ data-led choices including:

- speech
- narrative structure
- mixed register
- inform
- persuade/advertise
- dual purpose
- entertain
- specific audience or selected audience
- phonology
- multi-modality
- formality
- graphology/text design
- genre
- discourse structure
- variant spelling/orthography
- inclusive pronouns
- archaic lexical choices
- dialect
- use of imagery
- semantic field of plants/flowers
- imperatives
- ellipsis
- symbolism
- play on words/puns
- synthetic personalisation
- highly crafted
- multi-audience
- power
- invitations
- graphic novels
- young audience
- capitalisation.

Successful responses tended to:

- include a range of groups within their response
- take an open-minded approach to grouping texts – not approaching the texts in a pre-planned way
- consider sub-groups and differences and well as similarities within the texts in the chosen group
- signpost their grouping choice clearly, often with headings for the group or sub- group idea
- exemplify clearly with an accurate use of a range of linguistic terminology
- root their response in the language of the data – there were few students who didn't address the 'linguistic reasons' phrase in the question
- link AO1 (language features) to AO3 (contextual factors) consistently
- use tentative language, often suggesting more than one reason for an assertion
- explore the given contextual information by 'fleshing it out' rather than simply re-writing the given information.

Less successful responses tended to:

- take a pre-planned approach leading to unconvincing groupings as the texts did not fit their plan
- be descriptive if they chose an 'inform' group
- offer a narrow range of language features or employ the same ones across a range of groups – imperatives, pronouns and graphology were often those features referred to
- create 'groups' with only 1 text (eg '*I am going to group E on its own...*')
- attempt to divide the texts into clear groups with no overlaps
- misunderstand Text D, thinking it was deliberately misspelled, suggesting that everyone was illiterate in the 18c including Robert Burns.

The data for question 01:

Text A – extract from '*Ethel and Ernest: A True Story*': most students responded well to this, commenting effectively on the relationship between the three characters, reflecting appropriately on the war context and nature of evacuation. Appropriate links were made to other texts according to graphology, speech and imperatives.

Text B – transcript of interview with Tom Daley: some responses were quite descriptive in approach, identifying some examples of non-fluency features. Successful responses discussed purposes to entertain a wide audience and informing those with particular interest in sports/diving. Many students also took into account the context of a radio show. Successful responses also considered the semi-planned nature of the transcript, commenting on the role of the presenter and interviewee, and audience questions. Less successful responses commented on 'nervousness' of speakers, or the age of Daley as the main reason for his use of language without fully engaging with purpose or radio context. Text B was mainly linked according to speech and subject specific lexis.

Text C – Note from Crake Good Neighbour Scheme: the majority of students grouped this text, addressing issues of register shift, with appropriate exemplification. Less successful students attempted to consider pragmatics, discussing shared understanding with reference to Crake and the location of the sports hall without fully engaging with the purpose of the text. More successful responses addressed politeness strategies effectively and the close relationship between Margaret and the recipients. This text was effectively linked to a range of other texts, mainly according to language methods.

Text D – Poem *A red red Rose* by Robert Burns: this text was least responded to, but some students did attempt to make some reference to it, albeit brief, as they felt that all texts needed to be examined. Successful responses commented on the use of dialect to communicate personal voice, repetition for emphasis and reinforcement, and use of personal pronouns to directly address the immediate response. Some students addressed the use of figurative language in some detail, considering alliteration, metaphors and symbolism to reflect love/relationships. Many students noted the archaic references, primarily orthography, but also covering pronouns and inverted syntax. Less successful responses only noted archaic lexis/spelling, without further comment. This text was mostly linked according to purpose to entertain, figurative language and dialect representation.

Text E – Allotmore flyer: this proved a very popular text, mainly linked according to graphology, subject specific lexis and imperatives. There were also some links made according to gender – suggesting this text would most appeal to women due to the image. Some detailed discussion was offered linked to graphological aspects and discourse structure with reference to textual reception on a work noticeboard. Successful responses noted the ‘modern’ approach to allotments and identified language methods in accordance with this. Less successful responses listed key features without making links to context or made generalised assumptions that the text was aimed at retired people, based on their own stereotypes about allotments.

Text F – Cover from *Full Metal Alchemist*, a graphic novel: this text attracted a number of different responses. The majority addressed the nature of the text as the book cover/blurb particularly examining how the writer hooks the reader with sufficient information. Genre was explored fairly well, linked to manga/anime and the use of graphological features and lexis suited to this. Less successful responses adopted a feature-spotting approach with minimal discussion of contextual factors. This text was frequently linked according to genre, graphology and lexical choices/figurative language.

Text G – Invitation from Simon Pure jewellery: this proved a popular text, with many students linking this to other texts according to graphology and lexis. Some students also linked this to gender representation, considering appeal to mature, feminine women through the use of colour and lexis. Many students noted the gardening semantic field and explored the effect of this intertextuality, but this was a feature often missed by students.

Section B

Power was, for the first time the most popular choice, closely followed by Gender. Senior examiners reported marking more Technology responses in this sitting – clearly students felt the data for this question was particularly accessible.

Question 02 – Gender

Many students engaged strongly with the data and explored it very successfully, linking usefully to ideas from language study. Many students had an excellent grasp of the Mills & Boon genre and had clearly examined it in their study of Language and Gender. Stereotypes were fairly well explored, with clear focus on the representation of the strong male character juxtaposed with the weaker, breathless female character.

Successful responses were able to link ideas about stereotypes and representation to the context of the text as the opening to a romance novel, considering appeal for the target audience of the ‘perfect’ male and a relatable female protagonist.

Gendered weakness was explored in some detail, linked to Penny’s mannerisms – ‘upheld hands’, her physical appearance as less dynamic than that of Professor Chadwick – ‘brown eyes’ vs ‘icy blue’, and her speech – ‘husky’, tentative and asking questions to avoid conflict. Stereotypes were also closely linked to the language used by the writer – the use of feminised descriptions ‘smooth as silk’ and ‘twinkling eyes’. The level of detail offered about the male character was also successfully discussed with reference to the audience – female readers wishing to read more about males than females. Some students over-stated the aggression of Professor Chadwick and the weakness of Penny.

There was some application of research linked to gender study, not always successfully. Issues linked to difference and dominance were mainly well explored, with some reference to Coates, Tannen and Lakoff. Colour terms were also discussed by many students. Some concepts were less successful: Zimmerman and West’s theories were sometimes discussed at length before being dismissed as there was no evidence of interrupting in the data. Trudgill and ideas about prestige were also considered, with limited evidence from the data, and consequently, such theories were made to fit the data.

There was some recognition of marked terms, with reference to ‘theatre sister’ but there was sometimes some misinterpretation of the data, assuming this term was applied to Penny. Occupational expectations surrounding the non-marked term ‘doctor’ were more successfully discussed, particularly in relation to changing social roles, whilst also recognising that, whilst Penny was a Doctor, she still held an inferior role in comparison to Professor Chadwick.

Students responded to a range of language features from the data to support their assertions, commenting on descriptive language including the metaphor of ice and contrasting descriptions of eyes and voices. There was some confusion over ‘husky’ – with some students suggesting that Penny was embarrassed as she sounded masculine. Innuendo was usefully discussed by the majority of students in relation to genre and romance, although there were some rather dismissive comments about the target audience for these novels. Medical language was often discussed with reference to genre (medical romance) but students often struggled to link this meaningfully to gender issues.

On the whole, most students who responded to this text recognised the context of the text as an excerpt from a romance novel, even if this was not fully explored. As such, there was less of a tendency to treat this as a real encounter than has sometimes been the case with representational data.

Successful responses tended to:

- explore the stereotypes linked to the romantic fiction genre
- recognise female audience expectations
- consider the occupational context
- acknowledge that the representation of Penny as a doctor was clearly a modern one linked to the date of publication
- understand reader expectations
- identify the portrayal of Prof Chadwick as dominant and authoritative but also as someone who had a softer side which therefore allowed him to be a typical ‘hero’ that readers could relate to
- appreciate the reversal of some stereotypes whilst maintaining others due to genre and reader expectations
- note the use of innuendo as a typical ‘convention’ of the genre linking it to readers expectation of ‘conflict’ at the start of this type of novel
- use theory relevantly whilst accepting the limitations of applying it to represented data
- explore the way the writer presented the characters and their different responses to their work/each other
- analyse the female writer’s use of clichéd language
- contrast the representation of the male and female characters’ appearance and represented spoken language.

Less successful responses tended to:

- misread that Penny is the theatre nurse or occasionally as the patient
- were prescriptive in their application of theory
- treat the characters as if they were real
- make gender theories ‘fit’ the data, forcing theories about spoken interaction to fit the narrative dialogue between the characters.

Question 03 – Power

This was the most popular choice of task for the first time. Senior examiners commented seeing a very even set of responses in terms of quality, it was rare to see very weak responses to this data in comparison to gender and technology. A range of relevant theoretical ideas were employed.

There was some clear focus on power types – with many students exploring influential power and social group power in juxtaposition with Sainsbury’s corporate power very effectively. Some students, however, seemed confused between influential and instrumental power. Most students were able to explore the power held by the protest group, but some students over-stated this somewhat, mainly by examining the use of imperative and modal auxiliary verbs – suggesting that the protest group was attempting to frighten and intimidate the audience’s compliance.

More successful responses engaged with the protest group’s appeal for community action, drawing on community ideals and pragmatics to achieve their purpose. Some students began to consider power within/behind discourse, but without fully exploring this, although comments were stronger when discussing power within the text. Similarly, some students effectively discussed the oppressive discourse strategies in place. There were some wider concepts considered, notably face and politeness.

There was some clear engagement with context, with some students exploring audience positioning and text reception in detail. However, not all students addressed the localised nature of the audience, instead focusing on the power of the protest group. Some students

were able to reflect appropriately on the role of Sainsbury's, their massive corporate power and the political power of the council in comparison to a small localised community, and thus were able to comment on the likelihood that this appeal would probably prove unsuccessful.

Comments were rooted in language detail, examining graphology/discourse structure, modality, sentence type/mood and lexical choices – linked appropriately to community action. Pronouns were addressed by most students, particularly focusing on the use of first person plural pronouns. Textual design of the clock and the ribbon heart were commented on in some detail, particularly when linking graphology to textual cohesion and time pressure.

Successful responses tended to:

- avoid overstating the power of the producer
- explore the subtleties of the power relations
- comment on the ways in which the text would be received and read
- recognise the empowerment of the audience
- understand the representation of the action group and of the campaign
- address the importance of influential power in the text
- appreciate the lack of room for opposition to the action group's argument focusing on community, regional identity and the town's heritage
- demonstrate understanding of the impact of the metaphorical language used by the text's producers
- comment sensibly on the lack of power behind the discourse
- recognise the action group's need to get the residents "on side"
- discuss instrumental power very thoughtfully in the context of the consequences for the residents of the proposed development
- analyse textual design and the meanings associated with this
- discuss how the audience was empowered by the text rather than the insistence that the text had power over the reader
- show good sense of the local context and the nature of community action
- evaluate the linguistic and graphological features of the text and their effects on audience.

Less successful responses tended to:

- misunderstand the protest group's role sometimes thinking a protest demonstration was the desired action or that the action group was helping the council
- focus on surface persuasive features
- insist that the text was intimidating the reader.

Question 04 – Technology

More popular than in previous sittings, almost all students who chose this question focused on the data. Many considered a number of relevant language issues around text language, including details of how and why language is compressed for this medium and looked at what is not abbreviated (brand name, names of people, places) and why. Some also considered the boundaries between speech and writing and the deliberate use of features to mimic speech in texting. The use of sociolect and differing levels of formality were also discussed. There was some sensitive exploration of the use of the symbol 'x' in the texts to the two females. Although some students insisted that this symbol had never been used to represent a kiss prior to mobile phones, some considered its use as a discourse closing signal as well as the rapidly developing and shifting conventions in its use as a relationship indicator and linked this very well to gender, an aspect of AO3 and an influential contextual factor. The question of why people choose to represent and express emotion so freely in

texts when they would not do this face to face, certainly between mother and son, was raised and considered very thoughtfully.

Most students responded well to the data, reflecting on some of Alistair's choices according to recipients of the different messages. In particular effective comparisons were made between the messages sent to his mother (short and transactional) and his girlfriend (longer and interactional).

Some wider concepts were discussed – absence of politeness due to the relationship with message recipients, and face theory – although this was not always accurately applied.

A range of language points were addressed, including phonetic spelling, clipped forms, vowel deletion, ellipsis, abbreviations, letter/number homophonic representation, over-use/lack of punctuation. Most students linked these features to space constraints, Alistair's age or shared understanding with message recipients, particularly when discussing the content of the messages to his uncle. However, some students adopted a deficit approach, suggesting Alistair's lack of control over Standard English. Less successful responses also tended to address some of the more obvious features of compressed language, such as phonetic spelling and homophonic representation, missing some of the more subtle language features used by Alistair.

Most responses did remain rooted in the data, with few students abandoning the data to discuss wider aspects of technology.

Successful responses tended to:

- recognise the differentiation according to the various recipients
- comment on the specific linguistic differences in these texts
- explore the different functions of the texts
- recognise the pragmatic use of politeness in the texts to his mother and uncle
- link relevant knowledge from language study (AO2) such as compressed language/ speed/ease of use/cost/constraints and affordances of keypad/asynchrony/synchrony to the data
- engage with the differing relationships of sender to his receivers for example the use of 'x' for females, interaction with girlfriend, attempts to diffuse conflict with her, interaction with uncle, possible anger with brother
- avoid speculating too much about these relationships by remaining tentative.

Less successful responses tended to:

- drift away from the data with their comment resulting in a general analysis of text messaging and technology
- voice their opinions on the alarming decline of Standard English
- employ learned knowledge without linking to the data.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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