OCR
Oxford Cambridge and RSA

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470
For first teaching in 2015

H470/03 Summer 2019 series
Version 1

Contents

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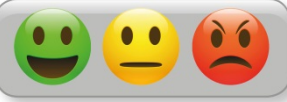
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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

General overview

The non-exam assessment (NEA) is a compulsory component of the A Level English Language qualification. It is worth 40 marks and counts as 20% of the total A Level. The non-exam component comprises two pieces of work: an independent language investigation and an academic poster.

For the language investigation, candidates should conduct independent research into an area of language study of their choice and produce an investigation report. The recommended word count for this investigation is 2000-2500 words, excluding raw data and appendices. For the academic poster, candidates should produce an overview of their investigation, repurposing the content of their investigation to meet the poster form and their chosen audience. The recommended word count for the academic poster is 750-1000 words.

Guidance on preparation and marking of the NEA is included in the specification, including the marking criteria. Marking should be positive, rewarding achievement rather than penalising failure or omissions. The awarding of marks must be directly related to the marking criteria. Teachers should use their professional judgement to select the best-fit level descriptor that describes the candidate's work. Teachers should use the full range of marks available to them and award all the marks in any level for which work fully meets that level descriptor. Teachers should bear in mind the weighting of the assessment objectives, place the response within a level and award the appropriate mark. If a candidate does not address one of the assessment objectives targeted in the assessment, they cannot achieve all marks in the given level.

Centres are responsible for internal standardisation of assessments.

The independent language investigation and the academic poster provide opportunity for candidates to channel what they have learnt across their A Level studies into a topical area or aspect of language use that they have found most engaging, or indeed, to provide scope for linguistic exploration into unfamiliar territory. The specification encourages centres and candidates to view the NEA as a chance for candidates to select their own focus, and to shape the methods and approaches that are likely to yield the most fruitful and revealing outcomes. The whole moderating team have commented on the enthusiasm, resourcefulness and often high levels of inventiveness of much of the work that has been seen this series. We have seen work across all levels of achievement, but at every mark point, there has been evidence of genuine engagement, and thoughtfulness in the design and production of the investigations.

Task One: The Independent Language Investigation

Topical focus points:

Candidates have selected topics linked directly to the specification, and also drawn inspiration from their personal hobbies, interests and social groups, a range of professional settings, a host of media sources and from a variety of relevant and current social /political issues, demonstrating a whole range of approaches to the NEA task. Candidates have chosen written and spoken (including represented) forms of language use for their data sets, the most popular topics including representations of gender and power and child and second language acquisition.

Power focused investigations included a range of data sets, but again this series, speeches from political figureheads such as Teresa May, Jeremy Corbyn, David Cameron and Nick Clegg were often compared in various combinations, and from across the Atlantic, Donald Trump, Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama all made several appearances. As always, these individuals, and the readily available data sets, provided excellent sources for exploration, enabling access for lower ability candidates and scope for higher level candidates. Moderators commented that these types of investigations also frequently explored gendered language use, although, while for some candidates this provided a useful supplementary focus, in other cases it drew candidates away from richer contextual analysis on the political leanings of the speakers, inner/inter-party dynamics, the implications of the 'historical moment' and the influence of audiences and performance platforms on language users. Other approaches to exploring power included presentations of political figureheads in a range of newspaper articles (the best of which contextualised the political affiliations of the media source and readership); an interesting investigation on Judge Rinder and courtroom power dynamics; the power inter-play between sports commentators; and the power undercurrents between television/ podcast presenters and their guests (including inter-gender and same gender groups). Power was also explored within the real-life scenarios of the candidates, for example projects on teachers' interactions with different age groups and genders (exploring accommodation, convergence, and influential and instrumental strategies), within professional settings and the interactions between managers and employees (often also considering gender implications); and an interesting investigation into the interactions of interviewer and interviewee in a range of scenarios. In all these instances candidates had demonstrated skill in transcribing these interactions and some level of discernment in unpacking the various levels and manifestations of power.

Gender, also one of the most popular topics, was explored in a range of settings. Again, this year children's literature (Enid Blyton still the most popular) and films (Disney featuring most often) proved popular sources of data to explore presentation of gender. With these sources it's important that candidates are encouraged to be mindful that characters are constructed and are representative of an author's agenda and therefore that dialogue within the 'text' is represented speech. A plethora of television programmes and adverts were considered, including reality shows such as Love Island and a range of cosmetic adverts. Candidates also considered print adverts and typically their presentation of women over time (the best offered some useful insights into how the recent post #MeToo ideology might have influenced advertising approaches).

Language Acquisition (child and second language users) were well represented this year. Although these areas were still less popular than power/gender focuses, many of these investigations were some of the most thoughtful and individual. One memorable and incisive investigation explored how the children's programme 'Bing' supports child language acquisition. Another candidate had demonstrated considerable resourcefulness in facilitating the generation of creative writing tasks undertaken by year seven students to explore their developmental stage. A particularly fruitful and inventive study undertook to compare the power dynamics between a non-native English-speaking teacher and a set of native English-speaking students, considering the intersection of members' resources and instrumental power.

The moderating team were impressed by the range of more unusual data sources that were selected this year, and also the fresh approaches that were taken to some of the more popular sources (such as the study that explored how the Harry Potter series had generated neologisms from a range of classical and modern languages). The moderating team were particularly impressed with those studies which had identified real-life scenarios to generate data sources from, and the skill shown within the creation of the transcripts, this was deemed to be a highly successful approach and is encouraged in future series.

Applying the Assessment Objectives

AO1:

AO1 assesses the level of discernment in the methods and approaches candidates have taken to design their investigations and the depth/breadth and sophistication of the language analysis. The best investigations are those that offer concise introductions, that provide clear and manageable aims and hypothesises and that draw on concepts/contexts surrounding language use that are relevant to the topical focus and the chosen data source(s). Investigations with too wide or too narrow a scope, or that do not identify clear aims are less successful. The determining factor for the success of an investigation is the clarity of its scope and purpose, and sometimes capable candidates have not achieved as highly as they might have done because of a lack of focus in this respect. The best investigations also demonstrated careful selection of the language frameworks that were the focus of the data analysis. Candidates who can identify which of the frameworks/levels (lexis and semantics, phonology and graphology, pragmatics, discourse) are most likely to be revealing, generally produce the most successful work. There were instances where candidates had doggedly worked through all of the language frameworks, even where there was little value in doing so, and as such they could not demonstrate the level of discernment required for the highest levels.

Most work demonstrated an organised and logical approach to the investigation write-up, and candidates across the ability range effectively used section headings to coordinate all the elements of the study. The very best work additionally utilised subheadings for each language framework or supplementary questions to help a systematic analysis of the data. Candidates who produced quantitative data from their sources often used tables and graphs to good effect, and it was particularly helpful where candidates had placed these pictorial representations of data into the body of the work. Other candidates had opted to place these graphs in appendices, and this is also a reasonable approach to adopt. On occasion candidates referred to tables and charts that were not attached to the investigation, so in future series candidates should be encouraged to enclose these documents within the work via either method outlined above.

Most candidates demonstrated secure to excellent knowledge of language terminology and were able to apply it with varying levels of success (depending on level of ability) within their responses. Similarly, the best work demonstrated a secure academic register, suitable for this level of study. With regards to AO1, the quality of these two elements is one of the key differentiators, especially in the higher levels, and generally centres are treating it as such. There were examples of candidates being given marks in the higher levels where one or both of these elements were not as well-handled as expected, demonstrating that the need for careful editing and academic rigour has been overlooked.

AO2:

AO2 assesses the quality of engagement with concepts and issues relevant to the language study. These can, and most often do, relate to named theorists and theories. Generally, gender theorists such as Lakoff, Zimmerman and West, Cameron, and Tannen are dealt with in a knowledgeable way, although the differentiator at the highest levels is usually how critically candidates can engage with their relevance in a contemporary context. Some thoughtful investigations considered the work of key feminist commentators to broaden out concepts of gender representations that were present within the data source. Power theorists such as Fairclough, Goffman and Grice were used most often, and generally candidates were able to identify features within their data sources that support the theories. Candidates who are performing at the highest levels underpin their analysis of the data with a more nuanced critical engagement with the theories, exploring for example, how far power dynamics might shift within an exchange, or how various strategies might be used simultaneously by users, or how use of an adopted strategy does not guarantee that it will have the anticipated effect. Even though all the above-named theorists clearly have worth in discussing these topics, the best candidates tend to look beyond the scope of the specification and identify lesser known or more niche theorists. The strongest responses tend to use theory to underpin the design and production of their investigations, so that it is an integral and embedded part from the outset. The less successful responses typically only briefly mention concepts/ theories in the introduction and then do no more with them, or only introduce them in the analysis section (which is marginally better, but still not the best practice approach).

AO3:

AO3 assesses the level of engagement with contextual factors which might have influenced or be represented within the data source. These can include contexts of production related to the user (when, where, who, what, why), contexts related to a 'historical moment' (social, political, cultural, ideological factors that are reflected in the data), or contexts related to intended audiences and reception. The very best responses demonstrated a keen awareness of micro (the individual user/the specific audience) and the macro (the wider contexts) elements that shape the language choices within the data set. The less successful responses tended to consider very broad and generalised assumptions about contexts, for gender topics these tended to centre on the phenomenon of patriarchy, for example. More nuanced approaches tended to consider more specific contexts in relation to male-dominated spheres, and explored, for example, how women have broken into these settings (such as the world of sports commentary or politics) and are able to use power strategies successfully without conforming to male language-use stereotypes. The best of the responses, integrated contexts within the design and throughout all stages of the investigation.

Task Two: The Academic Poster

The academic poster provides opportunity to synthesise, reshape and re-purpose the key outcomes from the investigation and is assessed against AO5. The specification recommends a generally academic audience for the poster and it is recommended that candidates firstly identify what this audience is. The best responses outline this from the outset so that they can consider how to transform the content of the investigation to make it accessible and engaging for their new audience. Examples of audiences that worked well this year were: lower sixth form students who are preparing to undertake their own language investigations, parents at a parents' evening and an undergraduate conference. However, candidates are invited to consider other contexts where their academic posters might be seen by a 'generally academic' or a niche audience. For example, a study that explores gender representation in cosmetic adverts, might generate an audience for the poster at a cosmetic branding meeting or a feminist's conference on the media representation of women. A study on child language acquisition might generate a poster for early years/ primary school trainee teachers. An investigation on Teresa May's power strategies might generate a poster for a Conservative party conference, or for an opposition party conference. The least successful posters generally have fallen at the first hurdle of understanding who the audience will be and therefore what the purpose of the poster is. It is often evident that these candidates have not fully engaged with this task, viewing it as a replication of the investigation, rather than an evolution of the key ideas and outcomes that are contained within it. It should be noted, that whoever the new audience is imagined to be, it is essential that this information is recorded on the front sheet (at the least) and/or the poster so that the moderating team can determine how successful the candidate has been in this part of the NEA.

The academic poster needs to synthesise the key information from the investigation to meet the needs of the new audience. The best examples prioritise drawing out the key content from the study, briefly contextualising the investigation (via a concise aims/hypothesis/methodology section) and then drawing out the key findings and conclusions as their focus. The task word count is between 750-1000 words, so there should be ample textual information to unpack the key content, and it is probably useful to imagine that the audience who will read the poster has no background knowledge of the investigation specifically, or possibly the area of study, generally (depending on who the imagined audience is). The best posters used contextualising strategies such as brief overviews, glossaries, or key theory summaries to provide access to the analysis of the data, which is where the focus lies. The less successful posters tended to get the balance wrong – spending too long on introductory elements and not enough time on the findings/conclusion sections, or they produced too little content or provided large, dense sections of undigested text (sometimes directly lifted from the investigation). Some less successful posters simply didn't engage in any meaningful way with the new audience in terms of adapting the register. However, there have generally been fewer examples of candidates cutting and pasting content from their investigations. It has also been noted that centres are much more aware that posters that contain a considerable amount of lifted material should be placed within the lower levels of the marking criteria.

The academic poster is also assessed against the successful utilisation of visual tools and its multi-modality therefore provides scope for candidates to demonstrate their ability to communicate information via a range of mediums. There were a lot of posters which demonstrated diligent, and at the highest levels, extremely creative approaches to this task, showing an ability to balance content and purposeful visuals (graphs, tables, charts etc. and graphological aspects that underpin key ideas within the study). It seems that many candidates still consider the visual elements as purely aesthetic, and so refocusing on the communication of information via pictorial tools would be a useful approach to take in future series.

Most common causes of centres not passing

The nature of the independent language investigation means that candidates are required to steer the design and production of their investigations, and this does occasionally result in candidates struggling to autonomously organise their workload, or following unproductive avenues, or taking flawed approaches. For this reason, it is advised that centres undertake regular progress reviews with candidates to help them sense check and to gauge their productivity. This is particularly key in relation to the academic poster as candidates do sometimes leave this to the last-minute meaning that they can achieve less highly in this task than in the investigation. Candidates also may overlook the importance of the editing process on both tasks, and this can result in them being unable to access the higher levels for AO1.

Common misconceptions

In general, this series has seen far greater confidence in the design and production of both tasks, demonstrating that centres and candidates are more comfortable with both formats. There are still many instances of the academic posters containing cut and pasted content, which is sometimes not addressed within the internal assessment. If a candidate completely copies sections from the investigation, then they cannot achieve beyond Level 1. If they copy some sections, but re-word and refocus others, then they can achieve up to Level 3. The quality of purposeful visual tools and transformation of register will then determine whether they are at the bottom or top of the appropriate level (based on how much content has been copied). Another common misconception within the academic posters is the tendency to focus on aesthetics rather than the synthesis of content (the priority) and the use of visual tools to present information or provide contextualisation.

Avoiding potential malpractice

The independent nature of the language investigation means that there is less likelihood of plagiarism between candidates within centres. However, now that there are three series worth of OCR and centre generated exemplars available, centres should be alert to derivative topics and approaches. This is more of a consideration for written text-based sources as their content is by nature unchangeable, and candidates may be drawn to the same interpretations as work that has been produced in previous series. Centres can avoid this potential malpractice issue by encouraging candidates to choose other sources, but explore similar topics, or change the focus and use similar sources. Candidates should also make sure that they use appropriate referencing systems and attach bibliographies (citing all secondary sources) to make sure that all sources are appropriately credited. Where candidates are generating transcripts from real-life scenarios, centres should make sure that appropriate safeguarding and ethical considerations are addressed (especially if the data requires access to vulnerable individuals).

Helpful resources

- Setting up a Language Investigation: https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-english-language-h070-h470-from-2015/delivery-guide/delivery-guide-ladg010a-setting-up-a-language-investigation/

- Approaching the Language Investigation Task: https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-english-language-h070-h470-from-2015/delivery-guide/delivery-guide-ladg010f-approaching-the-language-investigation-task/

- Independent Investigation into Language in Use: https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/169613-independent-investigation-of-language-in-use-teacher-guide-.pdf

Additional comments

Administration:

The following represents best practice in the presentation of candidate folders:

- Folders should be securely bound with treasury tags/ or staples.

- Please avoid loose sheets of paper or plastic sleeves.

- All front sheets should be attached to the front of the folder and all details should be correctly recorded: name of centre, centre number, candidate name, candidate number, task titles and intended audience for the academic poster.

- Word counts should be recorded.

- Bibliographies and (relevant) appendices should be attached to the folder.

- The academic posters should be word processed and preferably on A3 paper (even if this means sticking two A4 sheets together).

Internal moderation:

Most centres had undertaken some form of internal moderation, and this was generally a key factor in ensuring accurate allocation of marks.

Best practice for both first and second markers is to:

- annotate scripts in the margins

- provide summative comments linked to achievement within each AO

- address both strengths and limitations of the work within comments

- differentiate comments of different markers using different coloured pens or using signatures

- clearly identify which mark has been decided upon where marks have been contested

- make sure final marks on the front sheet and within summative comments match and are correct

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