



General Certificate of Education

English Language A 2701

Specification A

**ENGA4 Language Investigations and
Interventions**

Report on the Examination

2011 examination – January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

COPYRIGHT

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

General

The January 2011 entry for ENGA4 was very small with a significant number of candidates withdrawn. It did, however, include some sound investigations and lively and well-informed interventions, and most administrative matters were dealt with efficiently.

Language Investigation

Productive areas for investigation included answerphone messages, children in conversation with other children and with adults, rejection on television dating shows, interactive styles of celebrity television chefs, and Easyjet staff dealing with complaints. Candidates started well when they recognised the potential of choosing spoken data which was interactive in nature, which had a clear communicative context and which allowed them to explore connections between their own findings and pertinent linguistic research. *YouTube* supplied some lively and controversial exchanges, but candidates needed to be cautious when dealing with edited and fragmentary records.

By contrast, investigations based on data from stand-up comedy and song tended to be unproductive, with candidates struggling to deal with context and resorting to improbable assertions about the relevance of linguistic research. Similarly, despite previous warnings, political speeches continued to attract candidates who did not recognise the potential pitfalls: working with versions designed to be read rather than spoken; failing to recognise the significance of (often widely differing) contexts; inappropriately attempting to apply research findings based on conversational interaction; failing to appreciate that the speech may have been written by a speechwriter (or team of speechwriters), rather than by the person delivering it.

Candidates were most successful at meeting the demands of AO1 although imprecision or inaccuracy of grammatical description (eg 'abstract verb' and 'relative interrogative pronoun') was not always challenged and taken into account in the assessment. Some candidates were over-reliant on data tables based on identification of linguistic features which, on careful examination of the data, proved flawed. Typically candidates were well informed about a variety of published research, although Zimmerman and West, Bernstein and Lakoff were often cited as the most significant commentators on interaction styles, at the expense of more recent research which has modified or superseded their findings. In the work of the strongest candidates the research underpinned the investigation; too often, however, it stood by itself without explicit linking to the analysis. Success at dealing with communicative intent and the significance of context continued to prove most elusive, although the strongest candidates did manage to strike a balance between detailed scrutiny of particular exchanges and a conceptualised grasp of wider issues and contexts.

The most successful candidates:

- chose data which repaid investigation in terms of its communicative significance in a specific context
- formulated precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- gave a rationale for their methodology
- selected frameworks which illuminated contextual and communicative issues
- drew linguistic conclusions related to the aims and hypotheses
- evaluated the extent to which it might be appropriate to generalise from the conclusions
- outlined promising lines of further enquiry.

Less successful candidates:

- chose data on the basis of subject content
- proposed non-linguistic aims
- paraphrased the data
- took little account of the context
- ignored the participants' roles and intentions
- looked at what was said but not at how it was said
- demonstrated no awareness of the limitations of their findings.

Language Intervention

There were some lively and effective interventions, the strongest of which pursued a well-signposted and coherent argument and made absolutely clear what their piece was and where it might credibly appear. The most productive approach to planning and assessing the intervention was to be found in the work of those centres which had required their candidates to give explicit information about the audience, purpose, genre and place of publication for which their language intervention pieces were designed. Previously such practice had been illustrated in the standardising material and its adoption had been encouraged. It has become clear, however, that exemplification and encouragement are insufficient. In future all candidates will be expected to provide such information and AQA will provide a cover sheet which may be used for the purpose, although centres which have designed their own cover sheets (covering all of the required features) should feel free to continue using them.

A few innovative attempts were made (in the shape of radio scripts and beginners' guides in *Horrible Histories* style) to move beyond the more familiar opinion pieces or editorials – a welcome change, as many would-be editorials lacked the impersonal authority and detailed citations of a real broadsheet newspaper. At the same time, however, intervention pieces needed to be sited in a context in which serious debate about linguistic issues might realistically be reported or explored: it was never likely that dramatised discussion of Lynne Truss' prescriptions or the scattering of a few assertions across a message board would communicate the nature of debates and ensure a high mark for content (AO4c), however engaging the form (AO4a) and style (AO4b). The best work achieved a balance, with the strongest candidates demonstrating that they could match their knowledge and understanding of a contentious linguistic issue with a plausible opportunity for communicating the range of views and arguments which characterised the debate to a non-specialist but potentially engageable audience.

The arguments explored in the most successful interventions were expressed clearly and coherently in non-specialist language. In other cases, however, it was far from obvious what the intervention was advocating, and there were some confusing surveys of attitudes to a range of language topics such as accent, textspeak or slang. When the teacher and moderator could not follow the drift of the argument, it was unlikely that it would be appreciated by a general audience, and it was appropriate for such limitation to be reflected in the marking.

The most successful candidates:

- identified a serious linguistic debate (from amongst those covered in ENGA3)
- chose a convincing form and context in which to represent the debate
- provided a clear and non-specialist account of the principal differing points of view, and the arguments and evidence used to support them
- employed a range of structural and stylistic features appropriate to the chosen genre, audience and placement.

Less successful candidates:

- selected a favourite topic rather than a debate
- chose to write for a publication which would be unlikely to feature a serious debate
- adopted a one-sided or over-simplified point of view
- imported passages of course notes expressed in specialist linguistic terminology
- made a limited (or no) attempt to produce a coherent and cohesive text.

Administration

Moderators appreciated the efforts of teachers to meet deadlines at what was clearly a difficult time. In most cases marks and folders arrived on time and candidates' work was appropriately packaged. In some instances, however, there were considerable delays, and some confusion was evident in matters such as the use of candidate record forms and the absence of data. More rarely, work was insecurely fastened (with just a paperclip), or folded A3 sheets required to be disentangled from their binding before they could be read.

Difficulties arose in a number of cases from misunderstandings about folders which included a piece that had been submitted previously. In such cases the teacher must review the mark for the resubmitted piece to ensure that it is consistent with the standard which the centre is applying to other folders in the same entry in order to safeguard the integrity of the centre's entry as a whole.

It would be helpful if teachers would check that:

- the reverse of each CRF has been completed
- the breakdown of marks for AO4a, b and c has been made clear
- the data for investigation has been included
- the pages of each piece are in the right order
- candidates' work is fastened together in a secure, accessible and user-friendly fashion
- the pink copy of the candidate mark sheet has been sent to the moderator even when all candidates have been withdrawn or have failed to submit work.

Advice to candidates

To maximise your success you should try to do the following:

Language Investigation

Do:

- keep a focus throughout your investigation on the requirement that the data is intended to be spoken
- select data which has a precise context with clearly identified audience/participants
- explain why you have chosen to explore and compare particular pieces of data and participants
- explain how you intended to control variables
- formulate clear and precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- select frameworks which will help you reach conclusions about your aims and hypotheses
- focus on interactional and discourse features when analysing speech
- draw cautious conclusions about what you discovered, commenting explicitly on how far you have achieved your aims and tested your hypotheses
- ask yourself about the extent to which you can generalise from your conclusions, and consider further lines of investigation which might allow you to refine or extend your conclusions.

Language Intervention

Do:

- choose a debate which is characterised by clearly distinguished points of view and is studied for ENGA3
- decide where in the real world your intervention piece(s) might be published/broadcast
- use a cover sheet for your language intervention piece(s) and give clear information about what kind of piece you have written, who you see as the audience, what purpose(s) you aim to achieve and where you intend it to be published/broadcast (If your school/college does not provide such a cover sheet, design your own.)
- identify the characteristics and conventions of the genre in which you intend to present the debate
- cover the principal points of view and arguments
- use engaging, non-specialist language
- be prepared to challenge arguments and assumptions.

Try to avoid common mistakes.

Language Investigation

Don't:

- assume that data will be linguistically interesting just because you are interested in the topic
- choose vague or non-linguistic aims and hypotheses
- paraphrase the data
- treat your evaluation merely as an opportunity to make claims about how much better you would have done if you had only been allowed more time, space and data.

Language Intervention

Don't:

- choose a topic if it isn't specified as part of the subject matter covered in ENGA3
- expect anyone reading your work to be prepared to guess the answers to questions about audience, purpose and genre if you don't know yourself (and haven't made those answers clear)
- claim that you intend to place your piece in a publication which would be unlikely to print it
- base your piece on over-simplified or trivialised views about language
- indulge in an uninformed rant
- use untransformed class notes.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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