



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

English Language A

ENGA2

(Specification 2700)

Unit 2: Representation and Language

Report on the Examination

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General

As is often the case in the January series, there tended to be a small number of entries per school/college, many students resubmitting work for this unit. In coursework entries where only one of the two pieces consisted of new work, the scope for improving on the original mark was limited.

The best work demonstrated analytical skill in the Investigations and creative flair in the Productions. There were many interesting choices of subject and evidence that research and planning had preceded the writing of the coursework pieces themselves. The majority of students selected subjects, for Production as well as Investigation tasks, suitable for a study of representation, the key concept for the unit.

A few students, however, seemed unaware of this essential requirement and produced straightforward textual analyses and Production pieces with no clear representational subject or purpose. Marks in such cases were significantly affected by the omission of an appropriate focus.

Representation Investigation

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

Successful students included a brief introduction to their chosen subjects and source texts to provide a clear context and purpose for the Investigation. Some were able to link their subjects to broader linguistic issues or to social, cultural and ideological debates. The body of the Investigation went on to develop and support a clear line of argument.

Less successful students wrote generalised introductions that often took up nearly half of the permitted length, with the result that coverage of the actual source texts was skimpy and uneven. Others, in contrast, launched into analysis of their first source text with no preamble to inform the reader of the date, publication or representational context. In extreme cases, the chosen texts had no evident links in terms of subject. In others, although a subject for representational analysis was stated in an introduction, focus on the chosen subject was not sustained throughout the work.

Weaker Investigations lacked a line of argument, often being structured as a list of linguistic features used in the selected sources. When these lacked a clear representational purpose or effect, this had a serious effect on marks awarded. Students who struggled to identify the effects of linguistic features often fell back on paraphrases or summaries of the texts themselves. Others relied on bland vocabulary such as 'positive', 'negative', 'good' and 'bad'.

Students chose a wide range of subjects for investigation, many of them serious and topical. These included student fee protests, summer riots, Liam Fox, Nick Clegg, Amanda Knox, the hijab, Dale Farm, human rights, global warming, The Olympics, NHS reforms and the TV documentary *Educating Essex*. There was still a significant number of celebrity profiles, sometimes extended to the Production piece: in both tasks, students struggled to go beyond predictable analysis or representations. More successful investigations explored writers' implicit values and ideas as part of a structured argument, leading to prepared conclusions.

The majority of sources used were print media or their online versions. Some source texts were unmanageably long, in one or two cases nearly thirty pages; this generally resulted in fragmentary analyses and very limited overview or understanding of argument. A few students chose as source texts online blogs which, not being produced by professional writers, offered little in terms of interesting style or linguistic usage to enable the student to demonstrate linguistic knowledge and analytical skill.

Weaker investigations devoted too much attention to non-linguistic aspects of their texts or included unhelpful word class lists, with no discussion of the precise effects of individual examples. In a few cases, labelling was confined to examples of low-scoring features, with very limited reference to grammar or syntax. This limited the AO1 mark to the bottom half of the mark range.

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

The majority of students demonstrated knowledge of a range of linguistic frameworks with more or less accuracy. In the work of the most successful students both range and accuracy were impressive. Many students now include top band features, such as clause and sentence types, to demonstrate writers' skills in constructing a representation: to show, for example, how subordinate clauses can add subtlety to or qualify a main-clause assertion or how the order of elements in a foregrounded clause may significantly affect readers' responses.

Effective points were often simply made, by examining writers' lexical choices: adjectives for their emotive or descriptive connotations, abstract nouns for conveying the writers' or subjects' values and qualities, for example. Analysis of the various uses of verb tense and aspect was used to show temporal changes in representation of a subject, where sources represented a lengthy period of time.

Labelling errors are still quite common, however, some of these are evidently slips that might have been removed by careful proofreading; more often, errors occur in relation to subtle distinctions, as, for example, between verb participles, tense and aspect or sentence and clause types.

Awarding a mark for this AO is not always straightforward, therefore. It needs to reflect the student's performance on a number of elements: range of linguistic knowledge, accuracy in its application, relevance to representation, fluency and accuracy of expression in communicating analytical ideas to the reader.

It is helpful to moderators if schools and colleges are able to indicate, by marginal annotation as well as summative comment, how the mark has been arrived at. This was the case in much of the work seen; sometimes, however, frequent errors in labelling and technical accuracy were either not indicated on students' work or had been ticked as accurate. When this resulted in a top band mark, it was evident that weaknesses in the work had not been taken into account.

At the other extreme, a few students, who used a wide range of linguistic terminology, including top band features, such as sentence and clause types, were severely penalised for one or two labelling slips. The marking grid for the AO lists the hierarchy of features likely to be analysed at various levels of achievement; this gives a guide to awarding a mark according to range of knowledge. This mark may then be limited by the type and frequency of errors. It is still possible for a student to achieve a top band mark if errors are rare, given the other strengths of the work.

Successful students:

- had a clear representational topic, which was worthy of detailed investigation
- 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 as A, B, etc and highlighted quotations
- began with a brief overview to show 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 their points with brief quotations and used a varied linguistic register
- analysed a range of carefully selected linguistic features, significant for representation, from each text, underlining examples, where necessary, 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
- 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; B: Style and Structure

For the first part of this AO, students need to demonstrate control of the conventions of their chosen genre and to provide interesting, fresh and engaging content appropriate to their chosen publication or context of use and the specific audience for the piece. The subject for representation needs to be clearly introduced, and the line of argument should either produce a new or challenge an existing representation. Often, form was effectively reproduced, while content was very familiar and undemanding. The mark awarded for AO4A needs to reflect such imbalances.

In terms of genre, the majority of students chose to write reports or articles for newspapers and magazine. Monologues were less popular than in previous series. There were a number of short stories, letters to editors, debate speeches and a few leaflets, text book entries, reviews and blogs.

News reports tended to rely on previously published factual information and were generally less convincing as new or challenging representations of their subjects. This was particularly the case when well-covered events such as the royal wedding, riots or fee protests were written about in the present tense, as if for current publications. Feature articles, presenting a fresh perspective from a personal viewpoint on a topical subject were more successful, particularly when accompanied by a catchy heading, a brief, informative sub-editorial introduction with a clear indication of the writer's identity and role.

Some Productions could have been more innovative in their choice of representational focus: a spoof charity appeal for impoverished Premier League footballers may not be a complete success but is more intriguing to read than another defence of Katie Price's parenting skills or John Terry's essential decency. A defence of size zero models or single mothers may challenge conventional prejudices but needs to create a sense of real people with experiences that ring true. Too often, these challenges were a one-note outburst of injured pride and protest, particularly when the chosen genre was a blog, where the defence of the misunderstood teenager/celebrity/demonised social group was based on unexamined assumptions and generalised assertions. There should be very distinctive well-documented and plausible case histories to make the revaluation convincing.

Monologues were rarely accompanied by any explicit sense of a context for performance or a specific audience. In a few cases, style was colloquial, flat and unlikely to engage an audience. Students who produced leaflets tended to reproduce graphological features with great fidelity, but gave very fragmented accounts of their chosen representational subject, often not particularly appropriate to the task.

Music reviews of existing albums were often problematic in that they reproduced existing representations in the music press, often expressed in stock phrases; more successful were a small number of reviews of local, less well-known groups by writers who had attended a particular gig and whose detailed knowledge of the musical sub-genre in question enabled them to provide an interesting and informative context for new readers.

Short stories often lacked a clear representational purpose and were accompanied by Commentaries which failed to clarify the writers' intentions. This was even truer of incomplete texts, designed as extracts from imaginary novels. These entries often lacked sufficient depth of characterisation and control of voice and style to be convincing for the stated audience and context of use, the latter often referred to only vaguely, as, for example, a public library.

A few Productions lacked authenticity, in that they consisted of invented interviews with, or personal blogs by, existing celebrities or other newsworthy individuals. Although they sometimes demonstrated knowledge of form, the content was problematic in terms of content and voice.

Successful Productions demonstrated a convincing command of genre and argued with conviction in order to create or challenge a representation. Their writers used an appropriate and convincing voice and address, organised and shaped their content effectively to engage a specific audience and used a style that showed command of technical aspects. The best Productions were inventive and stylish. Flat, clumsy or inappropriate style, errors and flaws in expression, all limit marks. A few Productions had the appearance of first drafts, with intrusive errors that occasionally impeded the communication of ideas; this is inexcusable, given the opportunity to proofread and redraft.

Many of the subjects used for Investigations reappeared in Productions. In some cases, however, the Productions appeared to rely on one or more of the sources used in the first task for both factual information and representations. Amanda Knox, Nick Clegg, the BNP and teenagers reappeared as popular subjects. Fresh topics for challenging stereotypes

included: male fashions, female police officers, female referees, the paranormal and the Japanese whale industry. There were also some interesting pieces arguing for the social usefulness of arguably undervalued social groups, such as alternative comedians and bankers.

In the majority of cases, marking was fair, thorough and closely related to the band descriptors. In a number of cases, however, there was no indication of how the total AO4 mark had been arrived at, with no separate marks for A, B and C. This makes it difficult for moderators to assess the relative strengths that schools and colleges have rewarded and therefore to give pertinent advice for future entries.

C: Commentary

Given the required length for this element of the coursework entry, students need to select points for inclusion with particular care. Often, linguistic features irrelevant to representation were included at the expense of a clear statement of representational purposes and intentions. A number of students mistakenly wrote primarily about the mode features of their text, as required in Unit 1 of the specification, and referred only briefly, if at all, to the representation they had produced, its intended audience/purpose and context of use.

Some commentaries considerably exceeded the specified length. Students are not required to produce an exhaustive linguistic analysis of their Production pieces, but to select the features they consider to be most effective in terms of shaping readers' responses to their chosen subjects. Effects for minor features, such as alliteration, were sometimes overstated and unconvincing semantic effects were claimed for functional features such as auxiliary verbs and pronouns. Those who were able to identify sophisticated features in their writing often struggled to articulate their precise effects.

Successful commentaries had a clear sense of audience, genre and representational purpose and illustrated these aspects of their writing by referring to a selected range of linguistic features, including detailed word classes, phrases, clauses and sentence types.

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 majority of entries arrived ahead of the specified deadline, accompanied by the required documentation, although moderators noted that there was a high number of withdrawals. Most schools and colleges now include a separate cover sheet for each of the tasks, giving details of sources used in Investigations and genre, audience, purpose and placement for Productions. Most entries were submitted in clear plastic folders or attached simply with treasury tags. Such attention to detail is much appreciated by moderators.

In a few cases, no source texts for Investigations were included. This made the accuracy of linguistic labelling impossible to verify, particularly where quotations consisted of single, decontextualised words or partial sentences. A few entries continue to be submitted as loose sheets.

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

- 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.