

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
in English Language A (4EA0)
Paper 01R

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Introduction

The paper is organised into three sections. Section A tests only reading and is based upon an unseen passage. The passage studied in Section A in June 2015 was adapted from *River of White Nights, A Siberian River Odyssey* by Jeffrey Tayler in which we follow the writer from Moscow, which is tense and hot, to the wilds of Siberia, a place that is dangerous and beautiful in equal measures. Section B tests both reading and writing by asking candidates to respond to one of the non-fiction passages from the Anthology, in this case, *Climate Change: The Facts* by Kate Ravilious. Section C is a single writing task that is not connected to either of the reading activities already undertaken on the paper. The paper was well received with most candidates finding it very accessible.

Section A: Reading

Questions 1-4

The passage chosen proved to be accessible to almost all candidates, with very few experiencing any difficulties in reading comprehension. Question 1 tested the skills of selection and retrieval, asking candidates to say why the airport security guard suspected the writer of being a spy. This was a single mark question with only one possible answer and the majority of candidates were successful on this question. Question 2 was also a selection and retrieval question asking candidates to give two reasons as to why the writer's wife was upset and frightened. There were 2 marks available for this question and the mark scheme contained more than four times that number of possible answers. Most candidates gained full marks but those who did not, did so because they did not choose two distinct words or phrases or those that were chosen did not answer the question.

Question 3 asked candidates to explain, in their own words, what we learn about the taxi driver that the writer meets upon his arrival in Siberia. This question looks to reward the quality of explanation rather than simply identifying relevant text, and therefore the instruction to candidates to use their own words is important. The mark scheme contained over ten distinct elements of character that could feature in an answer and markers are instructed to be open to new and more original interpretations. Many candidates achieved full, or nearly full, marks and were able to explain how the taxi driver is initially presented as suspicious and potentially dangerous but develops to become a lively, protective and friendly character who has a great love for Siberia and an unusual pride in its dangerous wilderness. Where candidates did not score full marks some wrote about his appearance and age, but without any reference to his character. Centres should continue to make clear to candidates that this part of the paper is a test of reading and that a close reading of the passage will yield all of the material that candidates need to answer the questions. An example of the need for close reading can be seen in the example where a number of candidates misread the "peasant frankness" of the taxi driver as "pleasant frankness"; a very different thing entirely. The outcome of this is that they missed his down-to-earth nature, replacing it with a bland agreeableness.

Question 4 was the higher mark tariff question with its greater focus on the writer's technique. This asked candidates about how the writer tried to convey his thoughts and feelings about his journey. As is usual, candidates were provided with bullet points for additional support and to help them structure their answers. In the published mark scheme examiners are told that they, "must reward all valid points that show an engagement with the text and an appreciation of the writer's technique rather than have a set agenda of items that they are looking for." To support this, at the standardising meeting all markers were made aware of a range of possible interpretations and were told that they should credit any interpretations that were clearly founded in the text. Weaker responses were often limited to a small number of points focusing on particular elements within the passage, such as the taxi driver's criminal appearance. Many candidates were able to recognise the two settings and the main differences between them with better answers being able to see clear contrasts between Moscow and Siberia. Candidates should be instructed to say precisely what they mean and to avoid the use of a more teenage colloquial style that makes use of the negative, such as, "The writer's experience in Moscow wasn't great", or "The writer's wife was calm. Not!" By adopting a sentence structure based upon the negative, inevitably these candidates tend not to answer the question set, or to write in sweeping generalities that show only a superficial understanding of the text.

Better answers recognised the unusual shaping of the text as a whole, beginning on the plane to Moscow, before going back in time to experience the writer's departure and then forward to the arrival in Siberia. This structure allowed the writer to create certain effects of foreshadowing and to develop an atmosphere of threat and menace. Many commented on the extensive use of short sentences and on the use of simile. Less able candidates often struggled to see the change in the presentation of the taxi driver from initially hostile to becoming friendly, talkative and protective towards the writer. The most able recognise a range of features and use the text with discrimination to craft an explanation that focuses upon character and relationship, using textual references, which are apt and carefully chosen. Essentially the most successful candidates demonstrate higher skills of analysis and interpretation in evaluating the writer's techniques and do so by directly and doggedly focusing on the question. Very few candidates introduced any direct knowledge of Siberia from their own reading or experiences, rightfully relying on the text itself to structure their answers.

Section B: Reading and Writing

Question 5

Section B was based upon the pre-prepared text from the Edexcel Anthology for International GCSE English Language and Literature, *Climate Change: The Facts*, and focused upon how the writer presented the issue of climate change in the passage. As a prepared text, almost all candidates seemed to have knowledge of this text. Weaker responses often did not focus upon the question and lacked an understanding of the range of techniques that the writer of the passage employs. Many failed to comment upon the use of colour, image and layout in addition to the text itself. There were a number of mid-level responses that recognised features such as the idiom, "hot potato" or the more metaphorical, "nasty sting in its tail", but were unable to explain how the writer was using these

expressions to create certain effects. Stronger responses were those that were able to define a wide range of features and also understood the creation of humour and emotion amidst all of the popularising of science. The best answers were able to explain in detail how the writer was creating meaning and effect.

Question 6

The writing task in Section B was closely related to the reading text in Section B and asked candidates to write a letter to a newspaper about what young people can do to care for the environment. The title was a relatively familiar one that was accessible to almost all candidates. Many drew directly upon the passage and wrote about climate change, relating it to local schemes for reusing and recycling materials. The weakest responses were often incomplete, lacking in paragraphing or structure and communicating at a basic level, sometimes directly copying elements of the passage. Better responses wrote with a skilful command of the language, showing an ability to describe the ideas that they had in a persuasive and convincing manner using a wide range of techniques.

Section C: Writing

Question 7

Candidates were given two opposing statements about zoos and were asked to write, explaining their views. This is a question format that is familiar to candidates and a topic which proved to be accessible to most. Once again, it is noted that the writing responses and particularly the final mark questions are sometimes not answered at all by all candidates. It is vital that candidates time their responses carefully and take note of the mark tariff, giving section C one third of the time available to them. This question produced a variety of responses. Weaker responses were often very brief and were limited in their ability to clearly express their ideas, focusing upon a very simple, anthropomorphic view of animals and the lives that they lead. Weaker responses were often lacking in paragraphing and a sense of structure, which will keep them in the Level 1 and Level 2 mark bands. More able responses often showed that they were able to appreciate arguments upon both sides of the issue whilst explaining their own point of view with passion and interest. The best writing was noted for its variety and sophistication, its accuracy and control, which was sharply focused upon the needs of the reader.

Conclusion

Each section above contains specific advice about what characterises weaker and stronger candidates. Centres are strongly encouraged to practise responding to unseen passages in timed conditions. This will support candidates in focusing their answers on what the question has asked for and in using their understanding of literary effects as a means of addressing the question rather than being seen as an end in their own right. The same principle applies with regard to studying the Anthology texts. The best practice in writing involves time management so as to respond appropriately to the mark tariff and the time available. Candidates need to focus on developing textual cohesion through the effective paragraphing and structuring of their writing. At all times they should have the intended reader in mind and should make word level, sentence level

and text level choices with a clear understanding of their intended effects. Writing should be seen as a crafted artefact and candidates should be taught the skills of writing with this in mind, whatever the task may be.

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