



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English/English Language

Specifications 4700/4705

ENG1F/ENG1H Unit 1

Foundation and Higher tiers

(Understanding and producing non-fiction texts)

Report on the Examination

2011 Examination – June series

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ENG1F (Understanding and Producing Non-fiction Texts)

General Comments

On the whole a marked improvement from the January series in the preparedness of candidates sitting the paper was observed. However, it was still noticeable that candidates were much more prepared to cope with the Writing: Section B and less well able to cope with the Reading: Section A and this seems to be a clear area for centres to focus on. This was surprising given that many of the tasks in Section A are short answer responses, many of the tasks require a simple 'Point, Example, Comment' approach that we would utilise in any basic comprehension exercise. The nature of the tasks and the order in which they appeared was unchanged from January and will remain unchanged.

Questions 1 – 3 specifically address English AO2i and English Language AO3i 'Read and understand texts, selecting material appropriate to purpose'

Question 1

The majority of candidates completed this select/retrieval task successfully. Achieving 3 or 4 marks seemed to be the norm. However, the focus of the question was 'activities you can do in New York', so use of a verb was really required in each phrase or sentence written in response. Candidates sometimes offered only place names, which did not constitute an activity. Other candidates did not retrieve the required information carefully and stated activities available on the cruise ship.

Question 2 and Question 3

Most candidates were able to locate a number of ideas about the QM2. More candidates in this series, used the text and offered quotations from the text to support those ideas, which was encouraging. However, some centres might find it helpful to refer to the published mark scheme, both for January 2011 and for this series. On the mark scheme, a grid is utilised to mark this question on the basis of skills. Here, the 'Read and understand' part of the AO becomes important. The skills are measured by ideas, quotations or references to textual details and 'inference' for Band 2, 'inferences' for Band 3. Candidates achieving full marks here were those who were able to offer two or more ideas about the ship – the most common observations being about its size and the its luxuriousness – supported with quotation, backed up by a comment which flagged up the candidates' understanding.

This technique also guaranteed success for question 3 as well, which is marked using the same grid, but with more marks on offer. There were plenty of ideas in the biography about how the footballer Fernando Torres spends his free time. Indeed, the whole extract cited different activities that Torres does. Again, there were many improvements from the January series with the majority of candidates showing they were able to state the activity and support their point: 'Torres likes to go shopping, " I like to stroll around the big department stores".'

To move up towards the top of Band 2 however, the key word in the mark scheme, 'inference' suggests that candidates should comment on their point. Many candidates showed they were able to do this in this series, suggesting that Torres liked his own space, enjoyed peace and quiet and spending quality time with his friends, family and pets. These were all pleasing responses. Sadly, there are still a large number of candidates copying out huge chunks of the text verbatim, which did not earn them more than 1 or 2 marks.

Questions 4 and 5 deal specifically with English AO2iii and English Language AO3iii 'Explain and evaluate how writer's use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.' Question 5 additionally tests on, 'making comparisons and cross references as appropriate.'

Question 4

As in January, this was the question where candidates performed most poorly. However, on the positive side, it was noted that many centres had taken on board the advice from January's report.

Candidates who made a stronger response to this task were able to identify a number of descriptive features, most popular being the choices of adjectives to describe the water and the alliteration of 'worms wriggling'. It was pleasing to see candidates identifying the list of three to describe the water 'sweet, clear, running' and even more pleasing to see some candidates commenting on the use of contrast to paint two different pictures of the water. Though the child's point of view was, on the whole, less well handled, there were some good observations pointing out that the text was 'like a child's story', and others who identified that it 'used an anecdote'. There was widespread confusion about first person, second person and third person, but even some very weak candidates identified that the text used Honorin's 'own speech' or 'dialogue' using the "Oh look. Baby sister, look ...".

Many candidates, however, failed to read the question carefully and wrote about persuasive features (thereby missing the opportunity to spend some time focusing on descriptive features which would have helped them in Q6), whilst others wrote similar answers to ones they had clearly practised for the specimen paper. Sadly, however, many candidates did not write about language at all and discussed the content of the piece, supported beautifully and often with interesting comments, but with nothing to directly link to the required assessment objective and thereby the mark scheme, these answers could only achieve 0 marks.

Question 5

As stated in the January report, and in the AOs above, Question 5 is comparative and on Foundation Tier will always ask candidates to comment on and compare the presentational features of two out of the three texts. Candidates are generally more confident in dealing with presentation than language, though some again, blurred the distinction between language features and presentational features. Sadly, this often occurred with more able candidates who clearly knew they had to discuss both of these aspects and wrote about, and compared both in question 5. This could be a point for centres to note if they have candidates who are sitting both Higher tier and Foundation tier in one class. On tier F the comparative requirement is for presentation and on tier H the comparative element is on the language question.

The old adage 'write a lot about a little' tended to serve candidates well here. Better candidates chose two or three aspects of presentation, most often the use of colour, pictures and headings and successfully compared them, making interesting comments on the effects – the use of the colour blue and its link to water was picked up on by many, the use of the photographs in source 1 and the silhouette in source 3 was widely commented on. One particular candidate followed this up with some sensitive ideas about lack of identity in the latter linked to "Honorin isn't one girl. She's many." which was very impressive.

However, on the whole, there was a lot of listing of presentational features and describing of the features with no real ability to comment on why they may have been chosen or why they may be meaningful. Simple comments on the photograph of Torres, "It shows the reader what he looks

like” are really rather redundant in that a reader who has chosen to read an autobiography of a famous footballer is likely to know who he is and what he looks like already! More able candidates wrote about his casual pose and casual dress, concluding it reflected he was a ‘laid back guy’ and very occasionally linking it to the ideas of the text, which is excellent on this tier. Much more widespread however, was the dreaded “it makes it stand out”, applied to pretty much every presentational feature, which is never going to elevate a candidate beyond Band 1. Its new counterpart, “it drags you in” not only sounds distinctly uncomfortable for the reader, but again, is a simple Band 1 comment.

Question 6

Some centres appeared to be genuinely surprised that a ‘describe’ task appeared on the paper. However the new specification clearly stated that there will be one ‘shorter task which is more informative or descriptive and one longer task which argues, persuades or takes a viewpoint which must be sustained.’

There were some varied and engaging responses to this task, with candidates choosing the focus with which they felt most at ease. Some candidates latched on to the word ‘describe’ and produced effective pieces covering the two times of year. Others engaged more closely with the notion of the travel website and though employing some persuasive techniques were still ably painting a picture of their chosen place at two times of year. Examiners were asked to accept both of these choices equally.

The range of places chosen by candidates was impressive, though it has to be said that those candidates who chose a narrower focus were often more successful. A favourite local park in summer and winter was often tackled better than descriptions of India, for example. Candidates who chose sunshine holiday resorts often struggled with a second time of year, and could say little more about it than it was mainly closed or a bit chillier. However, theme parks in the summer hols, then at Hallowe’en or Christmas worked reasonably well. There were some ghosts of specifications past however, when slightly altered versions of a shopping centre open and closed appeared.

On the whole, aside from slipping into list like information at times, the majority of candidates handled this task with energy and enthusiasm and these answers were engaging and interesting, hitting many of the required descriptors. It would be worth reiterating that this question is worth 16 marks and a proportionate allocation of time would be about 20 - 25 minutes. One planned and effective side of writing, shaped, structured and paragraphed is going to do candidates more favours than three rushed sides, with the possibility of losing time for Q7, which is worth 24 marks.

Question 7

The persuasive magazine article on personal interests and hobbies was again well received and well handled. Given the amount of detail some candidates included on this response, they are to be congratulated for their stamina as much as anything else. There were many highly energetic, passionate and engaging responses about personal interests. Again, the variety here was extremely impressive. There was a predictable multitude advocating football, or dance, as a new hobby for fellow students to try. Sporting activities were very popular, and a whole range was suggested, including golf and fishing, more extreme sports such as BMXing as well as unusual ones such as coasteering and parkour.

The majority of candidates remembered they were persuading and supplied a range of devices to engage the reader. Some however did slip into informing for much of the article.

Sadly, candidates not reading the first line of the task brought about the most common mistake on this question. We received a number of responses where students wrote articles persuading other students to try their school or college and an equal number who were persuading students to try writing for the school magazine.

Overall, in both writing tasks, it is well to bear in mind that candidates who attempted to paragraph even in the most rudimentary way were able to move more securely into a mark band than those who didn't, and that candidates who attempted to stretch their vocabulary even if they were unsure about spelling were more likely to hit the descriptor 'engages the reader with ideas' as well as the descriptor for vocabulary. Similarly candidates who attempted to use a variety of punctuation marks and vary their sentence structures not only scored more firmly on AO3iii/AO4iii but, again, elevated the way their piece was matched to purpose and engaged the reader.

ENG1H (Understanding and Producing Non-fiction Texts)

General

Examiners report that the examination was accessible to all candidates. The source material was lively, varied and engaging and there was a good balance between retrieval questions and the more demanding, analytical questions in Section A, Reading. In Section B, Writing, the tasks offered candidates the opportunity to demonstrate a wide range of skills. Only a small minority of candidates were unable to allocate time efficiently.

Question 1

Most candidates were able to achieve marks at least at the bottom of Band 3. Candidates, generally, showed an ability to infer points from the text and so demonstrate higher order reading skills. The discriminator seemed to be in recognising that there was a counter argument in favour of renewable energy such as wind farms. A surprising number of otherwise able candidates appeared to miss this. A small minority of candidates discussed the effects of language in the source which was not asked for in the question. However, in so doing, they were able to coincidentally gain marks. Candidates need to understand what the question is asking them ; they should read the source fully for nuances of meaning and understand that inferring meaning from a text is incorporated in what can be learned from it.

Question 2

The arresting picture and headline offered considerable scope for a developed answer. Most candidates were able to make valid comments about the headline and picture and their effects on the reader. The weakest tended to be generic, the most successful attended to the detail in the picture and the meanings of the words in the headline. Candidates, generally, were less comfortable with articulating how the picture and headline linked to the text. However, many did at least make the direct connection between the 'iconic ribbon of water' and the picture which showed it. Candidates who achieved highest marks were able to explain the pun, the contrast of colours, the location, the significance of 'Up', the fantasy of toy balloons and Trappe's words about a peaceful experience. All of these aspects were available in the picture and headline, and resonated throughout the text.

Question 3

This question was successfully answered by the vast majority of candidates. Those who were less successful treated the question as a language question or failed to focus on Claire's thoughts and feelings. The question was not about the reader's thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the questions required interpretation and inference in order to explain the writers thoughts and feelings rather than simply copy or paraphrase from the text. A number of candidates stated that, in the end, Claire's feelings were of excitement and relief, but missed the point that these were dashed at the very end of the text. Candidates need to read the source texts with great care, paying attention to detail. That is what the 15 minutes reading time is for.

Question 4

This question was the most demanding of the questions in Section A despite its being built, to some extent, on the candidates' acquired knowledge and familiarity of the sources from the previous three questions. Some candidates achieved high marks for their responses to this question; but many did not. If there was evidence of direct comparison, far too often it focused on content, or purpose and audience, not language. Furthermore, there was an obvious weakness in the candidates' ability to select the most appropriate quotations. Despite all three source texts, especially the nominated Claire Frances text, being full of interesting, lively and vivid language, candidates too often chose peripheral examples such as pronouns or other single words. Candidates often defaulted to quite empty comments about 'formality' and 'informality', either without well-selected examples or with examples which were not, in fact, supportive. Those who did focus on language sometimes just listed linguistic techniques or devices without giving an account of effects and not comparing.

Fewer than 40% of candidates achieved a mark of 10 out of 16 or higher for Question 4. This suggests that too many candidates did not know how to address this question.

Question 5

Examiners report that, generally, this question produced some good, if rather depressing, responses (teenage pregnancy; divorcing parents; switching off of life support machines and terminating pets). More realistic, simple and well crafted choices, sometimes ironic and witty (e.g. which chocolate to choose, with humorous consequences), were often more successful. Some responses were deeply personal and evidently cathartic; some were excessively contrived narratives which, though often well communicated, diverged from any sense of reality. Many responses were lengthy, which usually added little to the effectiveness of the writing and may have been detrimental in terms of efficient timing.

Other issues to arise included the evidence of stultified and formulaic writing, often accompanied with a mnemonic in the margin listing essential devices to be included. There was also too much evidence of poorly punctuated and un-paragraphed writing.

Despite these negative points, there were some very good responses. However, it is for this writing task, rather than Question 6, that candidates need most guidance.

Question 6

There were some very good responses to this question. The demanding nature of the topic produced, in more able candidates, some extremely intelligent and well-presented arguments which often focused on the 'whatever the cost' part of the question and explored the moral, philosophical and financial issues. More mundane, but usually well communicated responses were concerned with recycling and domestic energy-saving. There were also interesting contributions from candidates with a more cynical view about the issues, which often employed irony and paradox in a convincing way.

There was less evidence than in the January series of candidates being unable to complete the paper to at least their satisfaction. However, candidates should be reminded of the need for planning, particularly with regard to the Section B tasks, and the higher mark tariffs for Questions 4, 5 and 6.
