



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English/English Language

Specifications 4700/4705

ENG1H/ENG1F Unit 1

Higher and Foundation tiers

(Understanding and producing non-fiction texts)

Report on the Examination

2012 Examination – January series

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ENG1H (Understanding and Producing Non-fiction Texts)

General Comments

Examiners reported that candidates found the reading sources engaging and accessible whilst offering sufficient challenge to discriminate ability. The writing tasks were also accessible and engaging. The shorter task allowed candidates to respond to a real-life, functional issue and the longer task presented a polemic to which candidates responded with enthusiasm.

Question 1

In the opinion of examiners the source material was well suited to the task. The basic message of the piece was accessible but it also offered sufficient scope for a more perceptive and fuller understanding and interpretation. In order to achieve a mark in Band 3, candidates at least needed to show understanding of the 'two nations' idea referred to in the text - the North West/South East divide regarding rainfall, and that both rainfall and flooding were issues. Failing to note these two essential aspects of the text meant that a mark no higher than Band 2 was possible. Around 70% of candidates achieved a mark from Band 3 or higher for this question.

Less successful candidates focused too much on the first part of the text, dwelling too long on the comparison with other countries and the quotation from Shakespeare. Similarly, a number of candidates digressed too far into the issue of global warming or the cost to the country of flooding. In such cases some of the essential messages from the text were missed. A minority of candidates wrongly approached the question from a language perspective and analysed the use of language techniques and effects rather than addressing the question.

The mark scheme required candidates to retrieve or summarise the issues raised in the source text as an essential response to 'what is learned'. Interpreting some of the subtleties of a text and presenting what is learned by candidates using their own words, rather than copying or simply paraphrasing, is an indication of full and detailed reading. The vast majority of candidates achieved this. Those who did so in a full and focused way, with an occasional perceptive comment, achieved a mark in the highest band.

Question 2

This was clearly an empathetic source text and picture which engaged candidates, differentiated effectively and produced a range of responses.

Candidates were generally alert to the effects of the headline and many were able to comment on the presentational features and on the words – as in the use of numbers and the shock effect of 'amputations'. Candidates particularly empathised with the picture and in some detail – Croizon's eyes, his shortened arm, the prominence of the watch, the colour gold and its connotations were all noted. Close and detailed reading of the picture enabled many candidates to write about how it elicited compassion and sympathy in the reader. Observations about the sub-headline were usually less precise except for those candidates who were adept at linking the words in the sub-headline with commensurate ideas in the text, such as the details of his accident. The ability to link the elements with the text was generally less successful. Too often candidates linked the elements with each other, usually the headline and the picture. Their ability to do this indicated that, had they read the question carefully and responded adequately to it, their efforts would have been successful. The most able candidates made careful and appropriate selections from the prescribed elements and made direct quotations, or at least references, with phrases from the text where these elements were elucidated.

This question allowed candidates the opportunity to read the text as a whole and show understanding of how the separate elements combined effectively. Although 86% of candidates achieved half marks or better for this question, only 60% were in Band 3 or higher.

Question 3

There was a feeling amongst examiners that the source text for this question was accessible and that the responses were generally successful. Candidates seemed to have understood that the focus of the question was on the writer's thoughts and feelings, and the majority recognised and explained that these changed during the course of the narrative. There remained a number of candidates, however, who approached the question inappropriately. These candidates focused on the content of the narrative, or on the effects of the events of the narrative on the reader or, in some cases, offered an analysis of the effects of the language on the reader. None of these was asked for.

The purpose of the question was quite specific. It required a focused understanding of specified aspects of the text from the writer's point of view, and required an explanation of those aspects. A higher proportion of candidates (63.7%) achieved a mark in Band 3 for this question compared with Question 2.

Question 4

Examiners reported that candidates found this question challenging. Many candidates found it difficult to focus specifically and selectively on the language in Source 3 and their other, chosen source. Many spent too much time identifying the purpose, form and audience of the texts rather than focusing on the effects of particular words and phrases. There was also a misguided tendency to note and compare the content of the text- i.e. the events and issues, or to focus on presentational features. A further tendency was to note the use of complex or short sentences in one text and compare their use with the other but with no reference to language at all. Audience, purpose, content and sentence structure are not 'language'. Candidates who did select appropriate words and phrases often made generic or rather empty comments concerning their effects on the reader and made spurious attempts to compare. Successful candidates were able to select and quote, for example, descriptive words and phrases in one text and cross-reference these with descriptive words and phrases from the other. They then noted and explained the similar or different effects on the reader.

Another example of a successful approach was to note the employment of selected words and phrases which variously produced an emotive, excited, calming or anxious response in the reader from Source 3, compared with examples of factual or functional language from Source 1. The indicative content in the mark scheme offers examples of appropriate textual selection from each source.

Question 5

Examiners felt that this question was successful and allowed candidates to write from their own experience. There was, perhaps, often a restricted view of 'leisure facilities' which was taken to mean 'sport and leisure centres', although a good number of candidates took a wider and more varied view; cinema, parks and shopping areas, for example. Many candidates responded to the requirement to explain how facilities could be improved but weaker responses restricted the writing to advertising local possibilities in a persuasive tone. The most successful letters informed fully, explained in detail and recognised that the task included considerations for families as well as young people. The task also allowed for a number of registers and styles of writing and rhetorical, combative and ironic approaches were evident and often successful. Writing skills were generally accurate with weaker responses demonstrating an erratic demarcation of sentences and omission or misuse of punctuation. Successful candidates recognised that a focused and succinct response was appropriate for this shorter writing task.

Less successful candidates produced lengthy responses but with little or no evident correlation between length and added quality.

Question 6

Many examiners commented on how successful this question was in producing some extraordinary responses which were mature, wide ranging, highly structured, articulate, expressive and passionate. The topics chosen by candidates, which offered examiners a privileged insight into their world, included the implications of the changing style of examinations, course fees for students, student protests, the riots of 2011, decisions made by government on education and welfare, and a range of other social, economic, personal and political issues. Many responses articulated a mature understanding of such issues and candidates also challenged their stereotypes within this framework, often in an ironic or satirical way which was engaging, convincing and sometimes compelling.

The topic encouraged candidates to incorporate a variety of language techniques to argue or persuade and the most successful sustained control, coherence and cohesion. Not all successful answers were long. Higher ability candidates conveyed a sense of structure and consistency of tone whilst displaying conscious crafting through vocabulary choices and the use of humour. Some candidates chose to adopt a persona which helped to frame their response and provide a context for their argument. Others offered simplistic assumptions about the attitudes of older generations and made comparisons between the challenges of society today and the lifestyles of their parents. There were valid comments made about the pressures of school, constantly being assessed, and the varied impacts of technology. Even when candidates focused on seemingly trivial challenges these were often presented with conviction, humour and a strong voice. Although the writing was generally accurate, some less able candidates would have benefitted from a more careful approach to control of punctuation and spelling. Overall, candidates engaged with this question very successfully, leaving some examiners in awe that they could write so well at the end of a long examination and convey such genuine pleasure in expressive writing.

Conclusion

The issues which arose in the first two series of this examination in 2011 have re-appeared in this one, particularly with regard to the reading section of the paper. Candidates need to be aware of the skills required for each question, particularly questions 2 and 4. They are strongly advised to use the 15 minutes reading time to full advantage. The best way to do this is to read carefully through the question paper noting what is to be asked of them, then read the source material with each of the related questions in mind. Then read the source material again. Having done this, the time allocated for the reading questions will prove to be ample. For the writing questions, candidates should not write too much for Question 5 - 2 to 2 ½ sides is enough. This will leave enough time to create a full and considered response to Question 6 – the culmination of their exam.

ENG1F (Understanding and Producing Non-fiction Texts)

General Comments

This was generally an extremely pleasing series, with clear evidence that many centres had worked hard to prepare candidates thoroughly for the examination. There was what can only be described as a sea change in the preparedness of many candidates, suggesting perhaps that at Foundation level, candidates had benefited from more time and teaching on the specification before facing the final examination.

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

Question 1a and 1b both pertain to Source 1. It seemed that the majority of candidates found this material accessible and enjoyable. Over 60% of candidates were able to achieve full marks on Q1a. It would be useful for centres to remind candidates that clear sentences are helpful in enabling examiners to see the accuracy of responses; for example 'Rachel Latham is a swimmer' is clear, 'swimmer' is not. Likewise, lengthy responses supported by quotations are not required for 1a – the space supplied on the examination paper for this question is an indication of the length of response required.

1b was again handled well, with very few candidates not achieving a Band 2 or 3 mark. Most candidates were able to detect that Rachel loved swimming and back it up with a useful quotation, others referred to how seriously she took the sport and how she prioritised it. There were many interesting inferences made about Rachel's determination, confidence and ambitions. Where weaknesses occurred on 1b, they were marked by a lack of supporting quotation for points made or a deviation away from the question focus of 'feelings' and 'swimming career' to talk about other issues in the text such as how many times she had visited Sheffield.

Question 2

Despite the fact that over 50% of candidates were able to reach the top of Band 2 on question 1b, fewer than 40% were able to do the same on Question 2, which requires exactly the same skills, but for double the marks. It would be worth reminding candidates that the same method applies for both Q1b and Q2 – a standard comprehension response based on Point, Example, Comment to reflect the assessment objective, which tests understanding of reading.

Some centres had clearly taught their candidates this method and their application of a structure, for example, 'The first problem Gordon Ramsay faced was', together with a quotation and a final 'This implies' structure worked very well, even for the weakest of candidates.

Many candidates were clearly engaged by the text and many knew who Gordon Ramsay was (though this was not necessary for them to answer the question), and responded in detail to the task, methodically working their way through all of the problems the text presented. It may be worth reminding candidates that this is an 8 mark question and a further skill in the AO is to 'select', so to hit Band 2, reference to 'some problems' was sufficient and for Band 3 a more 'developed reference' to 'some problems' would work more efficiently in terms of timing.

Problems occurred again this series when candidates copied out the text, paraphrased the text and ignored the key word in the question 'problems'. Indeed, problems were caused when candidates failed to mention the word 'problem' in their answer at all. Very occasionally, candidates forgot about answering the question and wrote about their own footballing injuries, showing some empathy with the text but not really displaying their understanding of it.

Questions 3 and 4 deal specifically with English AO2iii and English Language AO3iii 'Explain and evaluate how writers use linguistic, grammatical, structural and presentational features to achieve effects and engage and influence the reader.' Question 4 additionally tests on, 'making comparisons and cross references as appropriate.'

Question 3

The preparation for this question from many centres was clearly noticeable in this series, with a far healthier percentage of candidates moving up into Band 2.

From the centres who had prepared well, even the very weakest candidates were identifying and exemplifying the rhetorical question and the list of three as being language features which might persuade the reader. Many candidates discussed the use of the second person pronoun and emotive language and others rather skilfully commented on the use of 'Be a sport ...' as a pun or play on words. It was very heartening to see the work that had been done in this area. Perhaps less confidently dealt with were features to inform, though fact and opinion were widely referred to, as was the use of statistics or figures.

It is disappointing, though, to still see so many clearly able candidates writing nothing relevant to the question and employing a method which involves writing out a quotation, and then essentially telling the examiner what it means, with no focus on linguistic features at all.

Fewer candidates in this series muddled up language with presentation. This is still happening however and it maybe worth continuously reinforcing the difference between the two terms with candidates. It is such a shame when candidates make a really valid point about presentation but in the wrong question, where we are unable to give credit for it.

Question 4

The most successful candidates on question 4 selected three or four aspects of presentation that the two texts shared and commented on, then compared those aspects. The most popular examples in this case would be photographs, use of colour and logos. Where candidates chose this route, they were able to successfully access Band 2 in terms of 'attempts to compare' and effectively create an opportunity to move up the mark scheme.

There were some interesting comments about the photographs of Rachel Latham, suggesting they showed the two aspects of her life and some candidates rather skilfully suggesting that the swimming shot is placed first, because Rachel puts swimming first.

Inevitably, there were lots of comments linking the colour blue to water and swimming, though very few who commented on the blue skies of the Sport Relief webpage by contrast.

Most common however were candidates who identified features in one text but could find no obvious point of comparison in the other, leading to simple Band 1 cross references on the lines of 'Source 1 has got this feature whilst Source 3 has got something else entirely'.

On the whole, comments on effect rarely made it out of Band 1. Sadly, 'it stands out' stood out as the most overused phrase, meaning that the majority of candidates hovered around 4 marks; this suggests that this is perhaps an area to target for the next series. The advice to 'write a lot about a little' (Report: June 2011) was taken up by very few candidates.

Question 5

The writing task on 'Dream Job' was really, on the whole, fun and interesting to mark and reflected some great work by candidates. Many were very confident with the letter format and matched their register appropriately to audience.

The varied selection of jobs that candidates chose to write about, was extraordinary. Though we had a predictable number of requests to be professional footballers, we had ambitious singers,

dancers, formula one drivers, astronauts as well as moving requests to work in caring professions and imaginative requests to be wildlife photographers and chefs in Michelin starred restaurants! The majority of candidates were able to give at least some reasons why they wanted to work in their chosen role and express those with at least some success, in an appropriate form and register. As a result, many candidates moved securely into Band 2, with an amazing 49% of candidates achieving 7 marks out of 10. The question had clearly fired candidates' imaginations and enabled them to really present their skills.

Candidates responded well to the advice this time to, 'write about a page' and this, hopefully, helped more candidates to achieve a balance in terms of timing.

There were few weaknesses on this question – a lack of paragraphing prevented some candidates from moving to the top of Band 2 and, very occasionally, candidates misread the question and made a formal job application or thought they were applying to work on a TV show.

Question 6

Again, this question was well handled by many candidates. Very few candidates did not have a point of view to argue and many did this very well and in some detail – at times over three pages had been written, which as the final question in a long examination, is absolutely to the credit of those candidates.

The majority of answers focused on footballers with many arguments suggesting they were not good role models for a variety of reasons – somewhat ironic considering how many wanted to be footballers in Question 5! Others made comparisons with other sports, some even making links and comparisons with Paralympic athletes such as Rachel in source 1.

However, candidates were remarkably well informed and used insightful evidence in their arguments from recent high profile incidents, commenting effectively on how racism, use of performance enhancing drugs, match fixing, etc. precluded many sports stars from being good role models. Register varied from the serious to the positively outraged, with some good natured humour being employed by some candidates as a method to engage their reader.

Less successful answers lost focus on sports stars as role models and drifted into the benefits of sport for young people, though there were aspects of these answers that enabled some of the descriptors to be hit.

However, a worrying number of candidates misread the question or ignored it completely and wrote a magazine article to argue or persuade about absolutely anything they liked – smoking, obesity and sometimes beginning with 'Don't Get Me Started On' It may be worth reinforcing to candidates that although the developed writing task will always require writing to argue or persuade, they must address the task set to achieve any marks for Content and Organisation.

Far fewer candidates omitted the question entirely in this series, which suggests that centres have worked hard to prepare candidates to deal with timing.

Finally, it may be worth mentioning one or two practical issues concerning the way the paper is marked. We now utilise online marking, which means that all scripts are scanned and presented to examiners on screen. It would be worth ensuring that all candidates write in black ink and write within the margins of their answer booklet.

A large number of candidates this time began writing their Q6 on page 13 of the answer booklet where the question was printed, but then continued backwards onto page 12 (the allocated space for Q5) instead of continuing forwards onto page 14. As the questions are distributed individually, this is really to be avoided and it would really be worth reminding candidates to keep their answer for each question in the allocated part of their answer booklet.
