



**General Certificate of Secondary Education**

**English/English Language**

**Specification 4700/4705**

**ENG1F: Understanding and producing non-fiction  
texts**

**Report on the Examination**

*2012 Examination – June series*

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## GCSE English/English Language

### Principal Examiner's Unit 1 (ENG1F) Report

This was a pleasing series with many students demonstrating their ability to engage with both the reading and writing challenges of the paper. It has to be said, however, that there was a feeling that many schools were sitting the paper for the first time and many of the weaknesses that students exhibited this time, have been pointed out in previous reports.

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

Questions 1a and 1b both pertain to Source 1 and the majority of students had little trouble locating four things about Johnny Depp from the many things in the article. Over 60% of students achieved full marks on this question. Where mistakes occurred, it was usually where students wrote down *anything* from the article rather than things which we learned specifically about the actor. Examiners were looking for Johnny Depp to be the subject of the response and this would be a useful technique to help students with their selection of material when preparing for the examination.

1b however, was handled slightly less successfully than in the previous series, suggesting larger numbers of the cohort were unsure as to what to do in this straightforward comprehension task. Likewise in question 2, similar problems were identified by the marking teams, leading to average marks of 2 out of 4 for Q1b and 4 out of 8 for Q2. As previously mentioned in the January report, it would be worth reminding students that the same method applies for both Q1b and Q2 – a standard comprehension response based on Point, Support, Infer to reflect the assessment objective which tests understanding of reading, and which is replicated in the mark scheme descriptors.

In 1b students were easily able to identify some of the unusual and/or interesting aspects of the visit (the first rung on the ladder of the mark scheme as it were) - the Hollywood star turning up unannounced at the school, Depp taking time out from filming to visit a little girl. Many students did not support their understanding with quotation or offer inference this time (the second and third rungs). This was surprising given how well handled this question was in the previous series.

Stronger answers did make quite clear inferences about celebrities not visiting anywhere without planning, how kind Depp was to acknowledge the letter in this way and one or two savvy individuals commenting on what a good publicity stunt the visit made!

Weaker answers deviated from the focus of the question 'visit to the primary school' and began to talk about Great Ormond Street hospital, showing they were unable to really address the 'selecting material' element of the AO.

Similarly on Q2, many students ignored the focus of the question entirely, 'the lifeboat rescue' and wrote about the RNLI. This would be a good teaching point for weaker tier F students – to work on finding the focus for selection in the question and then identifying the relevant material in the text, before working on how to present it to show your understanding (i.e with support and inference).

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The best answers here commented on the potential danger and/or bravery of the rescue, the problems the rescue presented to the RNLI and the solutions. There were some rather interesting inferences at times, suggesting the crew member swimming in the loch was very brave to risk facing the Loch Ness Monster, but equally many others made inferences about team work, determination and speed of response, the weather conditions and the location of the stranded boat.

Weaker students are still, heartbreakingly, copying out the text.

**Questions 3 and 4 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 4 additionally tests on, 'making comparisons and cross references as appropriate.'**

As in January, a good proportion of schools and students have got the measure of this question and we had more of a spread of marks here from mid band 1 to mid band 2. Even some of the very weakest students were able to identify one or two features and potentially exemplify them, the most usual being alliteration. Moving into Band 2, students identified a range of features from the text, such as rule of three, listing, emotive language and a surprising number commented on the anecdote from Captain Suleyman. However, students found it hard to rise beyond 6 marks as 'comments on the effect of features of language' remained simple and generalised, on the whole. This *is* a more difficult skill, but perhaps working with C/D borderline students to move them out of the 'it keeps you hooked' bracket into the ability to comment on what some key features actually *do* in a text, would really serve those students well.

Schools should perhaps be aware that just over 5% of students did not attempt this question (worth 12 marks) at all and just over 5% scored 0 for this question. Students scored 0 for writing about the content of the source material rather than the language or writing about the presentation features. These muddles are certainly worth tackling – 10% of students out of an entry of over 160,000 is a significant loss of potential marks.

Similar data is also to be found on Q4. Again, almost 10% scored either 0 or did not attempt the question. A similar spread of marks was evident with the mean mark being 4. This question is one that many students find difficult on tier F, in that they struggle to find meaningful things to actually say about the presentational features and additionally find it difficult to compare them. Certainly, they have more things to actually do here, and more skills to display. However, given that the question is worth 12 marks, it is clearly an area to target. As stated in an earlier report, the most successful students on question 4 select three or four aspects of presentation that two texts share and comment on, then compare those aspects. The most popular examples in this case would be photographs, use of colour and logos or headings. Where students 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.

Better students were able to comment on the use of the photographs, and the best students wisely chose Source 2 and Source 3 to enable them to compare the images of the two boats and their differing circumstances. Here some interesting points were made about the 'rescue in action' compared to the contrasting pictures of the film crew relaxing against the backdrop of blue skies. Stronger students discussed this in relation to the second image of the crewmember working, like the RNLI rescuers were working. This lead on to discussions of the colour blue and then the logo of the RNLI compared to the symbol of the postmark on 'Around the World in 80 days'

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However, many students write up to three pages and never move out of Band 1 by taking an approach such as: 'Source 1 has a picture of Johnny Depp at the school which really stands out to the reader whereas Source 2 has a picture of a boat which doesn't stand out as much', then moving through every presentational feature in this way.

### **Question 5**

Before discussing outcomes for question 5 it might be useful to address the concerns expressed by a small number of teachers. It really would be unhelpful for schools to think that 'letter' and 'article' could be replicated as the vehicle for writing in every series. It would be good practice to feel that if students are well equipped to write to inform, describe, explain, argue and persuade for a variety of audiences then they will be able to tackle any interesting question that is set.

This was an interesting question and Foundation students *loved* it. The senior examiners leading the examining teams have all commented on the lively, engaging nature of the writing they saw and the genuine enthusiasm for the task from students. As a result, over 26% of students achieved 8 marks out of 10 or above for content, with a further 52% making it into Band 2.

Students suggested a whole range of places for their peers to visit – providing apt information for the audience about their local park, their local library as a place to revise or famous landmarks in their area that students could visit for free or very cheaply. Some of this was presented in a highly engaging way, interspersed with questions from fellow presenters, which allowed more detail to be included. Students had a secure and even adept grasp of the required register with cheery openings, "Good morning students and welcome to ..." and clear sign offs, 'tune in tomorrow break for more suggestions of what to do this summer.'

Schools who were concerned about paragraphing really need to be aware of how examiners are taught to use the mark scheme. By looking at **Organisation of Ideas**, we have two bullet points – one pertaining to paragraphs and one pertaining to structural features. Examiners are taught to use these as a 'moveable feast'. In some non fiction tasks, like letters for example, we would expect to be paragraphed by those students who are so able, but other tasks such as leaflets might be organised just as effectively through a variety of structural features.

Students chose to organise this task (if they *were* going to organise the task, just as many choose not to organise their letters) either in a script format with Presenter 1 and Presenter 2 or names, or, if they had written as one presenter, they used paragraphs.

It is the Principal Examiner's philosophy that when you give Foundation students something interesting and engaging to do, they give you something interesting and engaging back ... and they did.

**Question 6** was perhaps a more apparently straightforward task, a letter to persuade, so it was interesting that so many more students came unstuck here.

On the weaker side, a surprising number of students misinterpreted the task and wrote a letter to a friend persuading them to swap schools and come to theirs. Others wrote a promotional letter for their school.

Weaker students who did address the audience of 'well known person' still, very often, wrote about how brilliant their school was and why the person should visit, or wrote to pop stars they were desperate to meet themselves and forgot about 'benefit to students'. A significant number decided Johnny Depp was worth a try since he'd 'got form' for these visits.

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Nevertheless, the majority of students again attacked this task with gusto. Many, to their credit, recognised that a letter littered with bold persuasive devices might not be suitable and as a result achieved a successful register, using more subtle rhetorical phrasing and questioning, list of three and opinions.

Students invited some wonderful guests – alive and dead – with inspiration and motivation for students being the key benefits from Stephen Hawking, Brian Cox, Alan Sugar and Usain Bolt. Students wanting to do well in examinations and boost their grades invited in Carol Ann Duffy, William Shakespeare, JK Rowling and many actors to help out in drama. The Queen, Barack Obama and David Cameron were also popular choices. It was really quite moving to read how many foundation students wrote in glowing terms about their schools and were keen to use that as a means of persuading the visitor to come. Their concern for other students and their grades and motivating them to do well was also frequently used and very touching – hence leading them to very solid Band 2 marks or beyond for successfully attempting to persuade.

The majority of students, for the secure way they were able to attempt purpose and audience here, were working in Band 2, with very few students remaining in the lower reaches of the mark scheme. Again, it might be useful for schools to note that 5% of students did not attempt this question, which, given its weighting of marks, might be an area to address in terms of timings for students and exam technique.

### **Practical issues**

As most schools are aware, this examination is now marked online. This means that students' scripts are all scanned, each question is separated from the rest and examiners receive those questions (items) in batches. We do not, as examiners, see whole scripts. Because of this, it might be useful for schools to spend some time, perhaps as part of the mock exam, 'walking' through a realistic mocked up paper with students. It is vitally important for students to write their complete responses for each question in the (plentiful) space provided and not in random locations of the answer booklet. It would be useful to remind students that on Questions 3 to 6 there is far more space provided than they need to allow for planning and there is no need to fill it. Given that answers are to be scanned, it would also be worthwhile reminding students (and invigilators) of the need to write in black or at least dark blue ink so that the good work they produce can actually be read.

Where students have arrangements to produce their work on a word processor, conversely, it would be worth schools bearing in mind that these scripts are marked by hand and have to be annotated by hand to achieve the fairest mark for your students. It was almost impossible to annotate and assess work in the professional manner we strive for, where the entire script was printed on one side of A4 in 8point single spaced font.

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