

Examiners' Report November 2008

GCSE

GCSE English (1203)

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel's centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information, please call our GCE line on 0844 576 0025, our GCSE team on 0844 576 0027, or visit our website at www.edexcel.com.

If you have any subject specific questions about the content of this Examiners' Report that require the help of a subject specialist, you may find our **Ask The Expert** email service helpful.

Ask The Expert can be accessed online at the following link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/Aboutus/contact-us/>

November 2008

Publications Code UG020606

All the material in this publication is copyright
© Edexcel Ltd 2008

Contents

1. 1203 2F	2
2. 1203 4H	5
3. 1203 3F	7
4. 1203 5H	9

1203 2F & 4H GCSE English

Introduction to Papers 2F and 4H

The papers proved to offer an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected, except that there were very few responses at the upper end of the Higher Tier range.

In Reading questions many candidates were willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers and how to present evidence. As in previous series, there is still a need to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'),

It remains the case that, if candidates paid greater attention to certain basic elements, they could often improve their performance significantly. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- In Section A, some candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Candidates should appreciate that **their response should be equally balanced between the two poems, whether the second is named or is one of their own choosing. A simple plan covering both poems, is a good way of ensuring that they do not simply forget that they are asked to write on two poems, as sometimes seems to happen.**
- There remains widespread confusion over the difference between poems, plays and stories, with candidates frequently mixing the terms appropriate to each genre, such as 'stanza' and 'paragraph' and 'poem' or 'play' for 'prose'.
- Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, preferably, or blue-black ink.
- The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is stressed annually. Some candidates have acquired the skill of leaving sufficient time to look over their writing and make improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all.

Paper 2F

Section A

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. The level of comment on language was a key discriminator. In the questions where a second poem had to be selected to go with the named poem, a discriminator was the ability to make a choice that could be justified clearly in relation to the specific demands of the question - or indeed the ability to choose any second poem at all. Many scripts showed reasonable understanding of content. However, when it came to handling language and technique answers became less clear. Most candidates could "spot" features but not comment fully on them.

Question 1

Question 1 discriminated well. This was a popular question, with a range of responses within the expected limits for this Tier. Better answers contrasted the descriptions of the deaths in a detailed way - noting the focus of both poets on the face of the dead person, the calmness of the first death and the violence/horror of the second. However, there were weak answers which failed to grasp the situation in 'Death in Leamington' and hence did not deal effectively with the onlooker's reaction. Similarly, in 'Dulce...' not all appreciated the haunting effect of the sight on the onlooker.

Question 2

Question 2 also had a good range of responses, with the stronger answers exploring the range of emotions on both poems and making appropriate choices for the second. Q2. 'The House' was regularly teamed with one of the Heaney poems or 'Half-Past Two'. There were generally reasonably exemplified accounts of the set poem, and pleasing attempts at contrasting the negative memories at the start with the more positive mention of the piano at the end. As with Q1, candidates focused on the first bullet, the memories, at the expense of the poet's feelings about them. Less successful answers revealed widespread confusion about the child's situation in 'The House' and did not attempt to compare the childlike view and description with that in the second poem.

Question 3

Question 3 also differentiated strongly, depending on how well candidates understood the content and context of the two poems. While some candidates dealt well with both poems, others wrote more successfully about 'Still I Rise' than 'Not My Best Side', where weaker responses described the maiden in terms of a stereotype, instead of noting her unexpected strength. A number of weaker answers confused the maiden's account with those of the dragon or the knight, simply working through each stanza, without distinguishing the three voices. The better answers showed a sound grasp of Angelou's speaker and interpretation of her character, with a pleasing focus on the way the language revealed this. On less successful responses, there was limited understanding of the social history/situation of black Americans and the issue of race, with a fair amount of confusion on 'slavery'.

Question 4

On Question 4, the choice of second poem often had a strong bearing on the quality of the overall response. The set text was regularly paired with one of the Heaney poems, and this led to some quite successful answers, with reasonably sustained interpretation. Less effective answers ignored the question's theme of 'change' and chose less appropriate poems. They also frequently contained evidence of some confusion over how to interpret the text.

Question 5

Question 5 received few responses, and these were of variable quality. However, it discriminated clearly, and enabled better answers to show a sound grasp of both poems. There was often sound and detailed linkage of the thistles of the title with the ideas of warfare and military issues. Weaker responses revealed less understanding of the poet's concern with time, history and the way the plants reflect human characteristics. 'A Blade of Grass' proved difficult for weaker candidates: answers often noted how little description was actually given, and the situation confused the writers.

Question 6

Question 6 was well done by some of the small number of candidates choosing this question: 'Wind' was usually paired with 'Storm', sensibly and with sound results. Less strong candidates tended to write about the first bullet, rather than the main thrust of the question - people's reaction to the natural events.

Section B

The use of textual evidence was a key discriminator.

Question 7 was a question which contained a strongly discriminatory effect. Answers often showed a grasp of the contrast between the two teachers, and of the way they related to the children. A minority of excellent candidates at this level noted how Joseph was a 'teacher's favourite' but also a friendless child; some saw the humour of his description. Some also noted that the Miss Precious was concerned to recognise Joseph's qualities and that she was proud of his attainment. Other candidates realised that one teacher was presented through appearance/clothes, the other through actions and the children's response to her. Weaker candidates confused the teachers and attributed their speech wrongly and some answers confused the narrator (the inspector) with one of the teachers. They also often struggled with the historical and geographical aspects of this passage.

Section C

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): weaker candidates often failed to communicate in well-constructed, comprehensible and accurate English, as well as tending to write only briefly and with little development of ideas.

Question 8

Question 8 was a question where there was no obvious 'framing' of the answers to fit the specified 'website', but many candidates wrote interestingly and often humorously about themselves. Most were happy with the way others responded to them, and on occasion were happy to be loners. Better answers explored the meaning of 'being an individual' and why sometimes it is important to be 'one of the crowd'. Weaker answers simply followed the bullets, showing little variation in sentence structure (most beginning with 'I').

Question 9

Question 9 discriminated sharply. A number showed good imagination and the ability to create a strong narrative line. There were some very graphic descriptions of armed robberies and large numbers of balaclavas, hoodies and scars. Many, however, were unable to sustain believable time frames for their accounts, or believable first person narratives, the events often continuing the day after they were witnessed, or out of sight of the 'eyewitness'. At the less successful end, a lack of basic punctuation also marked many narratives, which at best lacked crafting, and at worst reflected serious weaknesses over the conventions of written English.

Paper 4H

All questions discriminated well, and contained responses covering the full target range of grades (as well as some which fell outside that range).

Section A

Question 1

This question produced responses of widely varying success. Most candidates were able to access this question successfully although some made quite a small number of points about one or both poems and there was a great deal of feature-spotting. Some candidates' responses seemed to show quite a reasonable understanding of 'Yellow' and 'Half-past Two', but weaker ones paid scant heed to the wording of the question and so made little reference to the child's imagination. The quality of the answers was quite often unbalanced, in that candidates showed a much more secure grasp of one poem than the other. Reproduction of practised answers abounded, focused on different topics. Analysis of language tended to be weak and commentary rather over-simplified.

Question 2

Question 2 also discriminated through the precise focus of the question. A weakness among a few candidates was that they did not focus on the phrase "a strong sense of silence" and wrote generally about mood and atmosphere, sometimes choosing a second poem that was not particularly appropriate. Candidates generally showed quite a good understanding of 'Death in Leamington', but some struggled with the choice of a second poem: some chose 'Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom', 'The Send Off' or 'The House' but then found it hard to write about silence. More successful responses dealt with 'The Darkling Thrush' or 'Hide and Seek'.

Question 3

Question 3 elicited many very good responses. Among weaker candidates, there was a tendency to miss part of the question, the requirement to "link a sense of place...". The better candidates offered very thoughtful responses to both poems and many students demonstrated a good understanding of both. However, some were able to write much more confidently and successfully on one poem than the other and so the quality of their response lacked balance. Responses to "An Unknown Girl" were often surprisingly weak with few candidates producing strong answers.

Question 4

This question offered good discrimination; in general it was dealt with well, with the range of quality dependent on the closeness with which text and language effects were analysed. Most candidates chose "Digging" to compare with "Follower" and this clearly worked well, although occasionally weaker candidates did not distinguish the three generations clearly or failed to refer explicitly to the second sentence, simply writing about "relationships between individuals". Knowledge and understanding of the poems were generally sound, but many found it more difficult to comment effectively on the language used in 'Digging'.

Questions 5 and 6

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen, and there is, it appears, some inbuilt discrimination simply through the choice of 'Nature', which many Centres do not appear to consider. Those that take this selection often justify their response by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

Section B

Question 7

Question 7 received responses of very different quality. The majority found it a straightforward question. However, occasionally, candidates seemed never to have read the piece before. One or two focused too heavily on the first part of the article which is quite positive about US school sports. Most responses were clearly focused on the question and many candidates were able to demonstrate a generally good understanding of both the passage and the requirements of the question. There was occasional confusion as to who were the victims of the bullying. A couple of students chose to write about several of the articles from the 'Sport For All?' section of the Anthology, and occasionally there was such an emphasis on giving a personal response to the passage that focus on the question was lost.

Section C

Question 8

Question 8 evoked answers of widely differing quality, and hence was clearly an effective discriminator. Some less successful responses found it difficult to move beyond talking about horror films. However, a significant number produced thoughtful and well-balanced essays, mostly adopting an appropriate style and register even where the writing skills were often not very strong. There was much use of rhetorical questions and some candidates made effective references to a range of television shows to illustrate their comments. A few strong responses were marked by the convincing adoption of an angry 'voice' to show outrage at the damaging effects of violent scenes. Interestingly, most responses thought there was too much violence and some drew thoughtful conclusions as to the effect on society as a whole. Some responses showed an ability to construct a well-argued article with an understanding of how to be effective. Weaker candidates tended to produce rather brief answers, failing to plan adequately and maintaining a rather narrow focus: the lack of breadth of treatment and of development of ideas were thus clear discriminators. A few lost focus on 'Violence on Television' and wrote in more detail about violence in films and computer games. Accuracy was a problem for many who struggled to spell correctly and mark sentences with full stops. Punctuation for a significant proportion consisted of one or two marks only.

Question 9

Question 9 distinguished between those answers which were limited and pedestrian, offering little beyond a list of basic points, and those which conveyed a reasonable range of their own ideas clearly. Although most candidates adopted an appropriate tone and register, there were some responses where the style was probably more suited to a spoken report. Better candidates offered ideas which were appropriate as well as quite effectively organised & structured, developing views of how the library of the future should reflect the needs of new generations and becoming more of a community centre.

1203 3F & 5H GCSE English

The candidature was small, but increased in numbers from last year.

Papers at both levels worked well. Though there were individual differences in level of response, few candidates had few difficulties in coping with any of the questions and all discriminated well. The majority of responses demonstrated features within the C/D range of attainment.

The level of response overall suggested that candidates had been well prepared both for the reading and the writing questions; in particular the majority had a clear idea of writing for a specified audience and purpose. In some instances more care in terms of expression would have benefited candidates; typically 'u' and lower case 'i' still occur in answers in place of the full pronoun, despite the formality of the examination context, and the warnings in examiners' reports. The presentation of answers could also sometimes be improved - in a few cases the handwriting was almost illegible and in others the response was structured in a way which suggested rough notes. More successful responses were often prefaced by a plan which had provided the basis for a clearer, more confident answer.

Paper 3F

Most of the points made in the introduction to paper 5H apply here too. Again there was strong evidence that candidates had been carefully prepared for this paper.

Section A

The texts (two separate web pages relating to the goal of ridding areas of plastic bags) for Section A were accessible both in topic and language. Many candidates covered each of the bullet points methodically, commenting on each thoroughly and using the point/evidence/comment approach. Most commentaries were generally relevant, but weaker ones tended to be descriptive. Stronger answers attempted analysis and were able to go beyond "feature spotting" to explain how language and graphics were used to persuade readers. In general, responses which approached each text separately were more effective at this level than those candidates who sought to compare both. Whilst the latter often made sound points, these tended to be at the expense of detailed commentary. Most candidates responded well to the graphical features, especially the photograph in the Hebden Bridge text, and found plenty of language features (in particular the inclusive use of pronouns, the implications of the use of words like "international", the use of questions and so on) to comment on. Weaker candidates struggled to cope with both texts; some wrote about one text only, or confused the two, thinking that both were about the same place. Of the two, the Hebden Bridge text produced the better commentaries; in particular there was some useful analysis of the graphical features.

Section B

Question 2

This question provided a topic that candidates related to strongly, and the context also seemed familiar; as a result there were some well engaged responses. Most candidates had ideas on what to do, and conveyed these purposefully, using the "indoors" and "outdoors" division in the question to help structure their answers. Most adopted an appropriate tone and showed a sound grasp of context. For some, however, "script" meant writing a playlet, often no more than a chat between two students. Some also had problems with appropriate register.

Question 3

As with the Higher Tier, where a similar question was used, this topic struck a chord with many candidates and there were some lively responses. Whilst most responses showed a clear awareness of purpose and context, and developed a clear argument, which was conveyed in appropriate style and letter format, some candidates became too personally involved in the issues and their line of argument was weakened as a result of an over emotional response; such answers were often heavily dependent on unconvincing statistics and expressed in a style which was often too colloquial and even abusive. One examiner noted that better answers were often preceded by a jotted plan which had helped to keep the candidate focused.

Section C

Question 4

This was the less popular of the questions in this section, but it produced the better responses, perhaps influenced by the format of TV shows or Performing Arts courses. There were dangers that some candidates fell into, for instance of not reading the question closely, addressing the report to competitors rather than judges, or in offering advice rather than analysis. But these were the exceptions; many responses were clear, engaged and very appropriate; some could even be said to be astute.

Question 5

As with question 3, most candidates showed some degree of competence in writing a clearly structured and appropriately expressed letter. Some adopted a persona and sustained it reasonably well. Responses which took a positive line either in favour or against tended to fare better than those who examined both sides of the argument. Responses, perhaps rather unexpectedly, lacked personal engagement.

Paper 5H

Section A

Two texts were used for this section, both relating to recycling and going “green”, one a magazine article from National Geographic Kids and the other an advertisement issued by the Mayor of London. The central theme of both texts was one that was very familiar to candidates and clearly engaged them. The material was challenging, but the fact that one text was clearly aimed at children made it very accessible. In particular candidates responded well to the cartoon form and humour of the ‘National Geographic Kids’ text. Typical answers were competent, with a clear focus on the main linguistic features (imperatives, rhetorical questions, word play.) The design features also discriminated well; most commented on the use of colour, but sharp-eyed candidates picked out key details in the main illustrations (for instance the re-used birthday cards and the re-usable shopping bag) and commented aptly on their purpose. The second text (‘Starve Your Bin’) was considered less successful by most candidates (at the lowest level simply as “boring”) but there were also some well developed commentaries on it. Abler candidates in particular defined its purpose, audience and tone (especially the humour) clearly; the most discriminating comments were often those on the ‘speaking’ bin bag and the language, tone and implications of what it said. Candidates did not have to compare the two texts, but often the ablest candidates demonstrated their analytical skill by points which related the texts together. Another discriminating factor was the extent to which candidates addressed the central thrust of the question and tried to assess the texts in terms of the ways in which they encouraged readers to re-cycle. Weaker responses tended to list features in a very generalised way or to describe or summarise the texts without any evaluation.

Section B

Question 2

This was the least favoured of the questions in this section. Most responses were reasonably successful in terms of relevance of style and format, and in adopting an appropriate tone. The letters, however, tended to be brief, though often technically sound in terms of punctuation, grammar and paragraphing. Whilst many gave clear and useful advice to the manager, for instance suggesting improved packaging and offering customers re-usable bags, few candidates offered new ideas and approaches and some struggled to find much to say at all. The weakest turned the advice into a generalised promotional plea or assertive rant.

Question 3

There were some very lively responses to this popular question. Strong passions were aroused, if sometimes at the expense of logical argument, structure and technical accuracy; for instance a common spelling mistake led to young drivers being referred to, with perverse irony, as “wreckless.” Elderly drivers (one candidate defined these as those “over 40”) came in for much criticism. Weaker responses cast more heat than light on the subject, often using statistics in a vague or cavalier way (“80% of accidents are caused by older drivers”), or employing unconvincing argument (“This will stop us going to uni”) but there were many that were clearly, logically and - sometimes - engagingly written, occasionally using an effective journalistic style. Candidates used personal experience and knowledge to good effect.

Section C

Question 4

This was the less popular of the two questions in this section, but those candidates who did choose it had much to say that was interesting and relevant and brought their own experience effectively to bear on it. Most made a competent attempt to write a magazine article, as specified in the question, the weakest adopting a tabloid approach, which occasionally extended to the use of un-assessable typographical features (mostly columns and illustrations.) Most responses were developed and thoughtful, and commented objectively enough on the causes of anti-social behaviour (boredom, lack of facilities, parental weakness) and the possible cures in the form of the provision of more facilities (for instance opening schools on a 24 hour basis) and sanctions (sometimes draconian - for instance, bringing back the birch.)

Question 5

This produced some very good responses, mostly in favour of the idea of providing laptops in schools and colleges; some were knowledgeably and impressively developed, despite this being a final question. Most, too, at least attempted to balance arguments for (including improved legibility and spelling) and against (including damage, theft and misuse), before coming to a conclusion; the level of analysis was quite pleasing. The lack of a given audience produced some interesting reactions; some created their own potential reader in an effective way, but others were less at ease. (In contrast some candidate responses to Questions 3 and 4 found it easier to ignore the specified context and audience and write generically.)

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 1**Papers:**

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr	100	60	48	36	24	12
Lwr	61	49	37	25	13	
Cum %	5.9	23.7	49.7	77.5	92.9	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 2**Papers:**

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)
- 5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Upr	100	84	73	62	52	43	38
Lwr	85	74	63	53	44	39	
Cum %	.0	1.8	21.2	62.1	89.4	95.1	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 3**Papers:**

- 1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING
- 1B READING AND WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		60	48	36	24	12
Lwr	61	49	37	25	13	
Cum %	18.8	81.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 4**Papers:**

- 1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
- 1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING
- 2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)
- 3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		60	48	36	24	12
Lwr	61	49	37	25	13	
Cum %	19.0	85.7	95.2	100.0	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 5

Papers:

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

2F CRAFT OF THE WRITER (F)

3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G	U
Upr		60	48	36	24	12
Lwr	61	49	37	25	13	
Cum %	18.8	73.5	89.7	97.4	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 6

Papers:

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1B READING AND WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E
Upr	100	84	73	62	52	43
Lwr	85	74	63	53	44	39
Cum %	.0	.0	.0	66.7	66.7	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 7

Papers:

1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E
Upr	100	84	73	62	52	43
Lwr	85	74	63	53	44	39
Cum %	.0	.0	.0	50.0	100.0	100.0

GCSE English 1203 - Opt 8

Papers:

1AT TRAN.SPEAKING & LISTENING

1BT TRAN.READING & WRITING

4H CRAFT OF THE WRITER (H)

5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E
Upr	100	84	73	62	52	43
Lwr	85	74	63	53	44	39
Cum %	.0	8	16.5	40.2	81.1	84.3

Further copies of this publication are available from
Edexcel Publications, Adamsway, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4FN

Telephone 01623 467467
Fax 01623 450481

Email publications@linneydirect.com

Order Code UG020606
November 2008

For more information on Edexcel qualifications, please visit www.edexcel.com/quals

Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales no.4496750
Registered Office: One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH